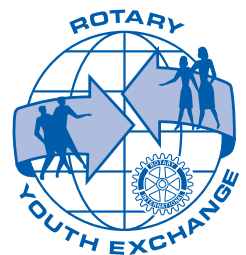


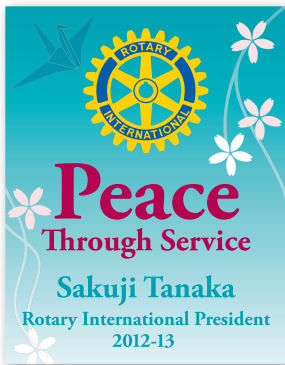


Letters from Abroad . . .

RI District 9800 - Youth Exchange Program - 2012



Some reflections and images from our Youth Exchange Students 2012



Rotary Youth Exchange

Rotary International District 9800

A Message From The District Governor

For most Rotarians the Youth Exchange program has always part of Rotary and a significant part at that. In fact the program started way back in 1927 with exchanges between Denmark and the USA. Many other exchanges quickly followed and between different countries.

In 1972, the RI Board of Directors recommended Youth Exchange to clubs worldwide “as a worthwhile international activity that promotes global peace and understanding”, which has particular significance in this Rotary year of “Peace through Service”. As with most worthwhile programs our Rotary District has been at the forefront and has been an enthusiastic participant in this program for at least the best part of 50 years.

We are now seeing second and third generations of families participating in the program because it was life changing for the parent. Many parents of a Youth Exchange participant became a Rotarian because they had seen what the program has done for their children.

Rotary International has eloquently captured the value of the program – “The most powerful force in the promotion of international understanding and peace is exposure to different cultures. The world becomes a smaller, friendlier place when we learn that all people — regardless of nationality — desire the same basic things: a safe, comfortable environment that allows for a rich and satisfying life for our children and ourselves. Youth Exchange provides thousands of young people with the opportunity to meet people from other lands and to experience their cultures. This plants the seeds for a lifetime of international understanding”.

Of course it is not just the student who benefits from the program; families, members of Rotary Clubs,

schools, communities and all who come into contact with this program in some way also benefit from the program.

The parents deserve special mention. It is hard to not only let your child go off to another country into the care of someone else but also with the knowledge that as a parent you are encouraging independence. The student who comes home will not be the same young person that leaves to go on exchange. I’ve had the opportunity to see and

compare the “before and after”. The confidence, the poise, the maturity and the recognition of what they have achieved define the qualities that will make that young person a most valuable and contributing citizen of the future.



The Youth Exchange program does not just happen. The commitment and effort of the Rotarians who really put “Service above Self” to ensure the smooth, effective and safe operation of the program deserve our grateful acknowledgment but to a person they say the outcomes of the program is reward enough.

The letters and images in this excellent publication really bring home to us what a life changing experience the Youth Exchange Program is for those lucky enough and courageous enough to take the opportunity that Rotary is able to provide for them.

DG Dennis Shore

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District Governor 2012 - 2013	Dennis Shore
District Chair New Generations	Neville John

Letters from Abroad . . . designed and published as a Service to Rotary by Dr Barry Mullen



A Message From The Youth Exchange Chairman

The stories displayed in this 2012 edition of 'Letters From Abroad' are inspirational and I thank our Outbound Students for their contributions to this unique D9800 Youth Exchange publication. Our students have been excellent ambassadors for Rotary International, Australia, their schools and their families.

Rotary Youth Exchange is a life changing experience and it fosters international peace, goodwill and learning. Each student acquires independence, self-confidence and in many cases fluency in another language. Rotary Youth Exchange is an educational and cultural exchange, which provides opportunities for students to live with Rotary families in other countries. During their 12 months on long-term exchange, the students become immersed in the Host country's culture and they develop tolerance and understanding, as they participate as volunteers in many aspects of Rotary Service. In addition, the students make lifelong friendships around the World, as members of our Family of Rotary. I urge the students to stay connected with their Sponsor Rotary Club and our D9800 Youth Exchange Committee, as we strive to promote peace, understanding and friendship in our world and continue to celebrate the accomplishments of Rotary Youth Exchange.

Congratulations and thank you to our dedicated and hard working members of the D9800 Youth Exchange Committee. In particular, grateful thanks to Committee members Graeme Bird 'Letters From Abroad' Co-Ordinator and Barry Mullen our 'Letters From Abroad' Production Manager for their excellent work and dedication to produce such an outstanding publication.

Good luck to our students and families in your future endeavours and thank you for your support and enthusiastic involvement in Rotary Youth Exchange.

Vanda Mullen

Chair
D9800 Youth Exchange Committee

Ben Wilde - Japan

My name is Ben Wilde, I'm 18 years old, and as I write this I'm sitting on the tatami-matted floor of my bedroom in Osaka, Japan.

My Exchange journey has been the scariest, strangest, and most wonderfully enriching experience of my life. I'm proud of what I've done and who I've become. This experience is something that will be with me for the rest of my life.

It's really an insane feeling, going through such a massive change. There are a number of milestones along the way: first day of school, first Rotary meeting, first time meeting the other Exchange Students etc. For me the biggest one was the first day of school.

I remember sitting in my chair at the back of the classroom as about 20 kids got up and gathered around me. Being the only non-Japanese person at the school, they took advantage of the situation. They asked me questions, practiced their English or just stared. That first day I felt so alien and the situation was so unreal that it was hard to imagine that I'd get used to the place. But I did, and now it's just one of the things I do. And that's what it's like with all the challenges you face on Exchange. You face it and then it just becomes a part of your routine.

At first it's all so exciting and you just kind of look around in wonder at everything, but after the first couple of months there was a period for me where the crazy foreign things became hard to digest (sometimes literally). Now, while I have not necessarily come to enjoy the taste and texture of chicken cartilage or sea urchin, I've come to love the cartoons on street signs and seeing women wearing kimonos on the train.

Learning a foreign language is probably the most amazing and revealing thing I've ever done. Because it's not just a different way of speaking, it opens up a doorway to a new world. My ability to speak Japanese is now one of the things that I'm proudest of. There are usually a couple of times each week where I'll be talking to someone and they'll say something which I'll understand but I



wouldn't have understood had they said it a week ago and I get a big old smile on my face and it makes my day.

Alongside Japanese life, I have enjoyed meeting other Exchange Students and being part of Rotary events. I've had two three-day trips, one to Tokyo and one to Hiroshima, plus countless other day trips. I've met wonderful people from all around the world and made lifelong friends. Rotary has made a big effort to ensure that we experience as much of Japan's culture as we can. I've been to more of Japan in these six months than most of my Japanese school friends have in their lives. There's always something to look forward to and something new to experience.

Some of the things I have experienced are: being whacked by a monk during meditation, bathing nude in outdoor hot springs, going to colourful festivals, riding on bullet trains, having fun at Universal Studios Japan, karaoke, origami, making lucky bracelets, visiting 1000 year old temples, watching snow fall and cherry blossoms, and wearing traditional Japanese clothes. And I know I've still got a lot more to see during the rest of the year.

I came on Exchange because I wanted to experience something new, to learn about the world and about myself. I filled in the forms, said my goodbyes and left, not really knowing what to expect. Now I am living in one of the world's most amazing cities, with a whole different family, living a whole different life. There are tough times and there are times when you feel like you're on the top of the world. But getting through those tough times is what makes you stronger, and a more complete person. You'll come through better on the other side with countless memories and you'll take this experience with you long after you've left. I am certain of this!



Ben

Bonnie Wagner - Brazil

Everyday I am facing new challenges, learning a new language, making new friends and discovering a whole new world of beauties. I've fallen madly in love with Brazil like it was the easiest thing in the world to do.

I'm Bonnie and I have just embarked on my seventh month in Brazil in a city in the state of São Paulo called Ribeirao Preto (which I couldn't for the life of me pronounce correctly until a couple of months ago).

I am constantly amazed and surprised by what Brazil has to offer me. Before I go on about how wonderful this experience is I need to say, it's not a holiday and it's not always easy and no one ever said or will say it is. It can be mentally and physically draining and you do have down days, although all the experiences I have had the pleasure of enduring, have all been worth it. I have found a new happiness here that I had no idea I had in me.

Within my first month here, I had been lucky enough to experience night life in São Paulo, long days under the sun at Guarujá and Carnaval and Tiete. And this was only the beginning. Everything excited me and nothing could have possibly wiped the smile from my face. From then until now, I have been to Brasília, the Amazon, Manuas, went back to São Paulo twice and visited other Exchange Students in from other cities like Morro Agudo, Franca and Monte Alto. Somehow I still managed to attend school!

Here I have learned to go with the flow and have become a lot more independent. I feel as if I have only changed for the better. I have matured, I have become more grateful and have learned not to have freak-outs over the little things. Brazil has also given me the travel bug. It has left me with dreams of seeing the entire world after I finish University.





6

Keeping in touch with everyone back home and my Gran, who I live with, especially is a difficult task. You become increasingly busy as the year progresses and the thirteen hour time difference is a pain in the neck. The first time I skyped with my Gran was after I had been here for four months. I believe in a way this is fantastic, even though I miss my friends and family immensely, I learned to establish my own life and gained so much.

The families I have become a part of here have been so patient, understanding and helpful. Especially because I struggled a lot with picking up my new language. They have been nothing but caring and encouraging. They are a massive part of what makes Brazil my home away from home.



This year seems to be the most amazing dream and it's going to end far too soon. If you are lucky enough to to have this opportunity or have enough courage to sign up for it - don't blink!

Ebony Gerrish - Germany

I am not quite sure on where to begin with all of my experiences so far this year in Germany.

I can honestly say that this year has been the best year of my life. I am so glad that I made the decision to take the challenge of going outside my comfort zone to become an Exchange Student. The experiences and opportunities that I have been given are far beyond the expectations that I ever could have imagined.

When I think back to the day I arrived in Germany, compared to now, I have come such a long way in so many things.

My language skills have flourished. I knew very few words in the German language when I arrived. I would sit in class at school and not understand a word of what any of the teachers were saying all day. I attended Language school every day for a month and now attend twice a week at night school. I have put a lot of hard work into my language skills; however I am starting to feel as if all that hard work has paid off. I now find that I understand the teachers at school, listening and speaking the language. I feel very proud that I have been able to achieve this.

I have had to adjust to temperatures of minus twenty and snow. I could have never dreamed of the weather being so cold. I will never complain back home in Australia of being cold again. I had to learn very quickly how to layer my clothing and dress for warmth in such cold temperatures. It was very exciting going to school in the snow. Having snow fights at school was also a lot of fun and something that I never dreamed of doing. I learned how to ice-skate and the funny thing was that I always wanted to become a figure ice skater..... Now I realize the skill that is involved in order to be able to perform all of those tricks and spins. A skill that takes lots of hard work and practise.

My Rotary Club of Kiel is very welcoming and I look forward to attending my superb Rotary lunches at the Kieler Yacht Club every Wednesday. Attending these



meetings has helped me immensely to settle in and getting to know many of the Rotarians. I have been asked to many exciting and different excursions that I would never have even thought of doing in my Australian lifestyle. I am truly grateful to all of the Rotarians for these wonderful and exciting experiences.

I have met some really lovely and fantastic people and have made some lifelong friends in the process. I have made many German friends in Kiel, as well as many other Exchange Student friends from right around the world. I joined a Handball team and I go to training once a week, as well as joining the local gym. I am entering a 10km run in Kiel in September and I am part of one of the Rotarians teams. I am joining Zumba with some friends for the rest of the year. I love being involved in many different sports and activities. I find that it gets me out meeting new people and being busy. I have been so busy that I have not even had time to be homesick which I am really proud of. I guess you could say that I am living life to the full and not wasting a minute.

I have done lots of travelling. I love to travel and I have been very lucky to be able to do a Europe Tour with other Exchange Students from my district. We visited six different countries and had lots of fun along the way. These countries included Czech Republic, Austria, Italy, Switzerland, France and Belgium. My Rotary Club took me to Greece in April. It was just amazing and I was so lucky to be given that opportunity. My host mother took me to Italy, France and southern Germany for a holiday which I was very excited about. I have been fortunate enough to spend ten days in Austria with a very good friend who was an Exchange Student from my home town of Tatura. I got to go hiking in the Italian/Austrian Alps. This was a new experience and the scenery was just beautiful.

The bread and chocolate in Germany taste very good. I have had to adjust to a different way of eating. I come home from school and we have a hot lunch, then something simple like sandwiches for dinner. All of the food that I have tasted has been very different and tasty. I have done some Australian cooking for my host families and friends. They have all loved it, especially the ANZAC biscuits.

I feel that I have easily adapted to the German way of life. I cannot believe that time is passing so quickly and before I know it I will be back to my Australian life again. I thank Rotary for giving me this wonderful once in a lifetime opportunity.



EBONY

Liam Holmes - U.S.A.



Exchange is life changing. It changes you as a person, your goals in life, your outlook on life, your expectations of yourself, and your views on yourself and the world around you.

Almost seven months have passed and I honestly just comprehend how fast the time has gone. When I left Australia for the United States, I honestly had no idea what to expect of this unknown city called “Albuquerque” but I was excited and ready to go!

The reason why I say ‘unknown city’, is because not many of my family or friends knew anything about it or even that Albuquerque existed! Some of you might know that Bugs Bunny missed his left turn at Albuquerque but apart from that famous quote you probably don’t know a lot either! When I checked into my Air New Zealand flight in Melbourne, they asked for my final destination, I told them “Albuquerque, New Mexico, USA” and they needed me to spell it and were very curious to know a bit more about this ‘Albuquerque’.

The journey to the States was definitely long but enjoyable. Originally, five other students and I were meant to fly out of Melbourne at 11 am but due to problems with our airplane we had a six hour delay. Our delay was probably not the best beginning to our year abroad but once we were in the air it was a great relief to know we were on our way. We were meant to meet with fourteen other students in Auckland, New Zealand and fly with them to Los Angeles but because we suffered that nasty delay beforehand, they had already left without us. We also had to spend the night in Los Angeles because we all missed our flights the day we arrived, but the night we had in LA was definitely a highlight, as we got to bond and get to know each other better than if we had left that day.

When I arrived in Albuquerque, it seemed to be the complete opposite to Melbourne. Albuquerque was in the middle of the desert, it was dry and brown, there were no big skyscrapers, in fact I hadn’t even noticed Downtown Albuquerque (CBD) and there were huge mountains surrounding us. Also the weather in Albuquerque is much more distinctive with freezing snowy winters and extremely hot dry summers rather than Melbourne’s one day hot, the next day cold weather.



There were big adjustments to make as I had just left my summer, school holidays and completely different time zone. I arrived into a freezing snowy winter, temperatures rarely were above 10, my first day of school was literally the day after I arrived and I was jet-lagged for probably four weeks. High school here is honestly just like the movies without the 'breaking out into singing' musical aspect, kids took their backpacks to each class with their books in them, we get those huge lockers we wish we had in Australia, we have six different classes (periods) a day, we have a school cafeteria, and I have to admit, there is definitely more drama in American high schools.

Since being here I have noticed how very fortunate I am to live here. I attend one of the best private schools in New Mexico, I've had awesome host families, met great Exchange Students and Rotarians in my district and made really close friends that I will always keep in contact with.

I have been skiing in Santa Fe and Durango, traveled to: El Paso, Texas, Phoenix, Arizona and Denver, Colorado. I also attended District's 5520 Convention, RYLA, Prom, Caving in the famous El Malpais Lava Tubes, and the 4th of July Parade. I have done so many activities but I think I would need a book for myself to write them all out!

Before I left to go on Exchange, I was questioned by many people about my preference to go to the United States. Many told me of some aspect I wouldn't gain as much as others who were going to non-English speaking countries. I would most definitely tell them they are wrong, here in Albuquerque, they have a strong Mexican and Native American culture, making things like architecture and food different from your stereotypical "fatty American food" and huge Los Angeles or New York skyline. Also here it's very common to speak fluent Spanish, in some cases like I found in El Paso; where many speak it as a first language.

Since living abroad, I have definitely changed as a person, I value my family and friends back home much more than before, I have a lot more respect for my parents and realize how much they have done for me, I have matured a lot, become more independent and now have a new home, a new family and a new life.

Thank you Rotary for giving this opportunity to me, you really have made a difference in my life and I don't want this year to ever end!



Liam

Claire Peppin - Brazil

wan·der·lust (noun)

A very strong or irresistible impulse to travel.

This one word describes my Exchange year so perfectly. I have a new urge to see the world and experience all that it has. This Exchange has opened my eyes to an entire new world that I am yet to discover. My desire to travel has grown since I stepped onto that plane in January, 2012. Shaking hands, tears in my eyes, yet a massive smile on my face, I set off on the journey of a lifetime to a destination far away from everything I had ever known. My destination : Brazil. "The country famous for its beaches, soccer crazy fans, samba music , the favelas and the green, yellow and blue"

This beautiful country that I knew little about last year has now become my second home. Life here is very different to Australia and the differences forced me to push the borders of my comfort zone. The people are so welcoming and gracious and have always done their best to make my transition and life here in Brazil as inclusive and smooth as possible.

All the typical stereotypes of Brazil have been broken as I got to become part of the Brazilian day to day life. Starting with the biggest stereotype of all, little known fact (for myself included) Rio de Janeiro is not the capitol of Brazil and is a state and not just a city. I am fortunate enough to live in the state of Rio de Janeiro much to the envy of many Exchange Students. I live in a city called Nova Friburgo approximately 130 km from the capitol. Traditionally a German/Swiss town, Nova Friburgo still holds aspects of the European colonization. It is a large city, nestled in the mountains surrounded by forests and national parks. Nova Friburgo also has many stunning waterfalls and high peaks that give incredible views in the higher areas of the city. Despite the proximity to Rio de Janeiro, the climate is cool and similar to Melbourne. This city has truly become my second home and here I have a second family, a second set of friends and a second life.

Since arriving in Brazil, I have had the opportunity to meet some of the most amazing people, with some even becoming really close friends. In the start however, I truly appreciated my Portuguese dictionary, as communicating to people was very difficult without much Portuguese. However, I think that journey, in itself, from not being able to speak in Portuguese to speaking well with confidence made the friendships I gained even more special. They had all helped me in that journey and without them, I would still be relying on my charade skills to communicate.



At school, in the beginning of my Exchange, it was also difficult, as despite studying English not many students had the skills to talk and process sentences. This forced me to improve, as it became very difficult for me, as I was unable to say what I wanted. The lack of my chatterbox self became the biggest motivation for me to learn this new and interesting language. My class was so welcoming, and after only a week, I felt like I fitted in. They made every effort to include me, even if it were encouraging me to read a sentence from a book or join in the class joke. The greatest memory however was when my class sang an unexpected happy birthday to me as the time passed midnight in Australia. It was such a great feeling and I am so grateful to them for making me always feel like one of them.

Other than being on this incredible journey, I have also had the chance to travel and see, and do, things that many never get the chance to do. I have swam in the Amazon River and explored the Amazon rain forest with 73 Exchange Students from

around the globe. I have also become lost in the Amazon rain forest. This experience was absolutely mind-blowing as I got to discover and explore an area so big and so foreign to the outside world. I was fortunate to hold and see alligators, piranhas and also a sloth. That was definitely a highlight of that trip. In the ten days of travelling, I got to experience every aspect of the Amazon Rain forest including meeting an Indian tribe that had only been discovered 5 years ago. As I live relatively close to the coast, I have also had the opportunity to visit some of the most beautiful beaches along the coastline of Brazil. Another major highlight of this journey was standing next to the 'Big Man' (Christ the Redeemer) and I got to truly appreciate how spectacular he is in real life. I have traveled to many cities within the state of Rio de Janeiro and enjoyed being the typical tourist at times in Rio de Janeiro. Each of these smaller adventures within my journey have really added to my love of this beautiful country.

This year, will always rank as one of the best. I know now that despite every homesick tear shed and every wish to come home, every single part has made this year as incredible as it has been. I have crossed the boundaries of my comfort zone and experienced all that lay beyond. I have tried new things that you are unable to in Australia and experienced what it's like to live in another country. I experienced pride as I told people where I was from and experienced what its like to truly miss someone (and how difficult it is to only see them through a computer screen). I have crossed the world by myself, and I am so proud of myself for doing so. I have experienced homesickness at its worst and dreamed of giving up and booking the next flight home but, despite all this, I have learned that you must overcome the bad to appreciate the good. I have almost finished this part of my journey, however, I know it is only the start to my next.

"don't be sad it's over, instead smile that it happened" (Dr. Seuss) Tchou!

Claire



Maddy Blair - Hungary

I'll start my experiences of Exchange from the night I found out which country I was to spend a year of my life in. It was about 2 am. And most people were beaming with excitement after finding out which country they were being sent to. Most people received their first choices.

I was sitting there, next to my new Exchange pal, twiddling my thumbs until finally my name was called out. I looked up, not sure if I was ready for what the next few words were going to be.

"You're going to..." This was it. "HUNGARY!"

I put on a worried, nervous, but excited smile. "Oh, awesome" I said a little bit dazed. "Hungary? I don't know anything about this place!"

Soon came the time to walk through the 'wailing wall' at the airport. I cried. Much more than expected. (To any future Exchange Students, don't let this frighten you at all). But I couldn't help it. I knew going on Exchange was something I really wanted to do, but those few steps to the door were just too far away.

Soon enough, I took those few steps, waved slowly to my parents, and walked through passport control. The officer who checked my passport looked at my photo. I know what he was thinking; "Why on earth does she look like she's been crying so much! What's so sad about going to another country at 15 years old?!" And the thing is, nothing is sad about it at all. I'm not sure what it was, but as soon as I walked through the end of customs, I felt a surge of super excitement flow through me. Like pop-eye after eating his spinach. I was so excited I'm pretty sure I skipped to where we were meant to board the plane.

My first week in Hungary... I'm not going to lie. I was homesick. Very, homesick. At first I thought it was because I couldn't handle the food. (2 hours after I landed I ate intestines without knowing). But I realized it was because quite literally I wasn't home. I know, I know, pretty lame homesick excuse. Soon enough it came to time to meet the other Exchangers living in Hungary. I was crowned "baby" of the group. Everyone else was about 1 year older than me. But, everyone was so super welcoming, it was almost like being home again.



At an old castle in Eger, Hungary.

Since being in Hungary I've had so many super, incredible and amazing experiences, like going to school in minus 26 degree weather, attending and working at the biggest music festival in Europe (Sziget Music Festival) which was in Budapest, going on 2 Euro tours, travelling around Hungary, going to multiple Hungarian weddings and going to heaps of festivals all over Hungary!

My best experience – so far – was just last week, where I worked and attended Sziget Music Festival with our new Rotary chairman. We worked at the caravan camping section for about 4 days before the festival, and then we cut loose and were able to just attend! I met so many new people, I went backstage about 3 times, ALMOST met The Killers and got in the second row for some of my favourite bands!

Overall, my experience in one of Europe's best kept secret countries, has been absolutely amazing and I recommend for everyone to visit Hungary at least once, or come on Exchange here! It's a brilliant country with so much culture and history, and my experiences have been 100% amazing.

Thank you Rotary!!

Maddy



Backstage at Sziget Music Festival



At a traditional festival in Miskolc, Hungary

Like to find out more about being an Exchange Student?

Visit our website at:

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Rufaro Zivave - Germany

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Australia, Victoria, Bacchus Marsh to Germany, Berlin, Spandau.

Exchange is the best thing that's ever happened to me! I don't want to even imagine how my life would have turned out HAD I not signed up! This is my life now, Exchange is part of me. I am an Exchange Student and always will be at heart. This year will come to an end, UNFORTUNATELY and I will come home but the spirit will never die, the Exchange Student spirit. The way the world is now, the way I see the world, it will never be the same again.

Your year abroad literally starts when those boarding gates close. When it all comes down to that last hug and good bye kiss and mumbled 'I love you's and 'I will miss you's' are said with tears running down your face.

Once you arrive in your host country, your host family becomes your family. They are there for you 24/7 and they welcome you into their home and hearts.

I have three new families now: two new sisters and four new brothers. They all play a special role in my life now. I think the biggest and most important thing to learn while on Exchange is how much family means. I mean, I love my family so much! There's no word in the English dictionary that can ever come close to expressing my love for my real family! There's no word in German, and I doubt that you could find in Spanish or Danish, or any language.

But Exchange is not only about FAMILY. It's about making friends too! I've made friends from all over the world. Legit! I have Indian, Taiwanese, American, Finnish and Italian friends - I mean the list goes on. I basically have a friend in every continent. C'mon, tell me that's not the coolest thing ever!



Olympicstadion, Berlin.



Spain

I have friends worldwide and local (German) best friends and a best friend who lives in Bolivia! But not only did I make new friends but I also find out who my real friends are back home. The ones who are happy for me and want to know what's going on while I'm abroad!

I HAVE fallen in love with Deutschland; the people, the food, the language, the culture and even the weather. The minus twenty degrees days are round the corner and sadly when they come, they'll be telling me it's time to go.

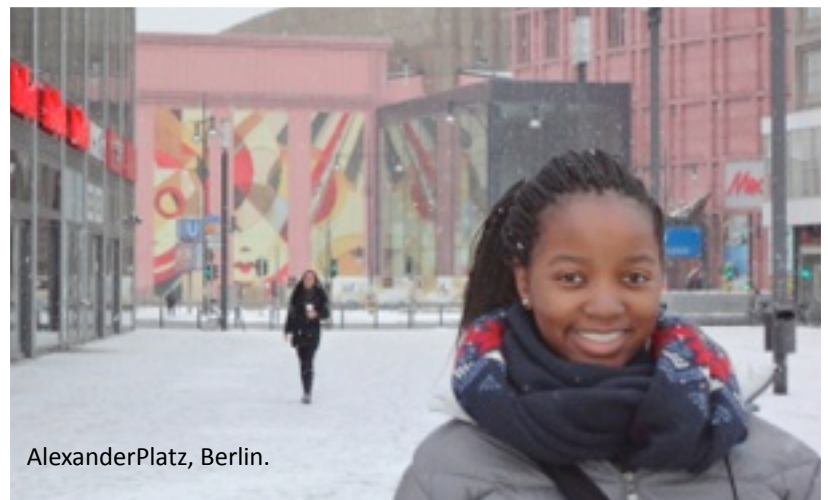
No one warns you that you are going to feel or experience every emotion under the sun! No one warns you that you are about to have an experience of a lifetime and that you have to enjoy every moment. To love every moment of your Exchange, especially the hard times because they make it all worth it! Believe me. I have been putting off this letter for a while now because all these things are now memories. All the stories, the introducing myself, the language barrier, the sleepless nights, the late night chats with new friends and my Australian friends, the sightseeing, the Europe tour, the parties, the host families, the waking up before the sun has even risen, basically everything. All memories! I guess I've reached the part I've been dreading the most. The end of my Exchange, well I still have two and a half months! And hopefully in this time I will be able to get this around my head. I am going to make every day count, right up to that day where I board the plane back home. I am going to cry both tears of joy and sadness because I will have completed my year abroad.

Because not every Exchange Student makes it to the finish line. Some pull out and some are 'disqualified', in other words sent home.

Before I continue, I'd just like to mention that no Exchange is ever the same. I mean, you can never compare one's Exchange year to another's. Never! If you do, well then you are doing it all wrong! Yes, we share the same experiences like getting taken out of our comfort zone at one stage or another, and we all leave our real family and friends behind to make new ones, and we leave our familiar surroundings and fly to a country on the other side of the world, (well to a country that has a different time zone to home) and we all learn a new language ... even if you do go to America (you will learn their slang, which is different to Australian slang) but never do we go through the same things (not at the same time and not to the same extent) anyway.



My Bolivian best friend, Paola and I in Italy.



AlexanderPlatz, Berlin.



Montjuic, Barcelona. Taking it all in!

'It's not a year in a life, it's a life in a year', you may have already heard of this Exchange year quote and it's true. It is a life in a year but this quote doesn't totally scream out what I want to express so, I have decided to modify it and in the process I actually came up with my own. I mean it's based on that quote 'Exchange is a year



Exchange Students!

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 where life begins', well I guess mine has a different meaning all together but they both have something in common right? They both have the word LIFE!

Exchange has been an eye opener for me. If I could, I'D DO IT ALL OVER AGAIN IN A HEART BEAT!

Big thank you to mum and dad for trusting me and for letting me go! You've made me the happiest daughter in the universe and I will never be able to thank you enough!

Also A MASSIVE, HUGE THANK YOU ROTARY! Both district 1940 & 9800! Thank you for THIS ONCE IN A LIFETIME EXPERIENCE!

Leibe grüße aus Deutschland,
 Rufaro Zivave.

In Canada, Calgary (at right). Rotary is part of my life now! Whenever I see 'Rotary International' my face lights up. I am happy to be part of an organisation that's doing beautiful things.

Rufaro



Nathan Turner - Brazil



It only feels like a couple of weeks ago when I was sitting in a normal school assembly and my year level co-ordinator said that he has an e-mail from Rotary seeking students wanting to do an Exchange, and I put my hand up straight away not knowing how right my parents were when they said "if you ever get the chance of doing Exchange TAKE IT!" Even though I had never been to another country before I

still wanted to do an Exchange! And to this day, I still don't regret putting my hand up.

Hi, my name is Nathan Turner I am 16 years old. I am on Exchange in the city of Florianópolis in the state of Santa Catarina in the south of Brazil. Florianópolis only has a population of 427,000, which is a big difference between me living back at home in a town with only 2,000 people and the population of Melbourne being 3.3 million! Florianópolis is also only 1 of 3 islands in the whole country. So far in these 6 amazing months on Exchange I have seen many beautiful things such as; beautiful beaches on the island, sunsets, sunrises, different animals, gone to beautiful cities and trips, made life long friends, learnt a new language that I feel comfortable speaking to anyone with, completed the goals I wanted in the year and, more importantly, become a whole new and better person! ***Before going on Exchange, or even joining Rotary, I was such a shy person and since I joined this great organization I can talk to almost anyone on the streets, become friends with anyone, speaking English or Portuguese.***

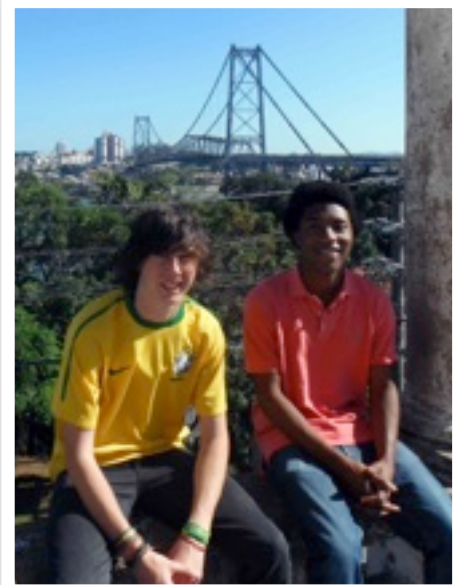
The amazing things I have done so far this year have been - going to Rio de Janeiro with my host mum and best friend from the USA, seeing the statue of Christ, the Sugar Loaf mountains and the beaches of Copacabana and Ipanema while I was there. I went on a trip to the Amazon that I will never forget. For 10 days I was in the city of Manaus and in the middle of the Amazon sleeping in hammocks, holding sloths, swimming with dolphins, being in the middle of the forest for 3 and a half hours with only 1L of water! While being in the Amazon I was with 73 other Exchange Students and made some life-long friends from countries like: Turkey, Slovenia, Belgium,



India, Canada, Germany and many more! I think the biggest highlight so far is when I went out kayaking into the middle of the beach just to see an amazing sunset and while watching the sunset I saw dolphins swimming around my boat! That moment will probably stay in my mind for the rest of my life!

I guess the hardest points of Exchange have been the leaving process, for the Exchangers who have been here from the Northern Hemisphere, who helped me adjust to the city, culture, the language and getting me right into the fun of this amazing life while on Exchange! those guys were like my family and always will be my family, they were there for me when I needed help, when I had problems, they were and still are the best friends I have ever had in my life and I think they always will be. But there will be new Exchange Students coming and they are going to be part of my Exchange Student family too, because the point of being on Exchange in Brazil, or I think anywhere, is to be open to others no matter what country, colour, or religion they are; we are all human so we can all get along no matter what! But the other sad part of the leaving process is also me leaving Brazil, I really do not want to leave Brazil, it is such a beautiful place! I can really call Brazil my second home.

My year in Brazil is coming to a close next January but I am trying to make the most of every second of it! By spending time with friends from school, my host family and the people that are close to me! I remember one of my best friends from Mexico said to me "Exchange is not one year in a life, its a life in a year" and I believe that! It seems like I have been born all over again. Being in a whole new family, new culture, learning a new language from scratch, first numbers, the alphabet, foods, etc., I recommend going on Exchange to Brazil for people who want to be more confident in talking to people because Brazilians love to talk, people who are willing to do things out of their comfort zone such as hiking trails just to get to a certain spot that looks beautiful, and in my city things like kayaking into the middle of the beach just to see a sunset because you never know how many beautiful things might happen while you're there, people who are wanting to learn such a beautiful language like Portuguese. Brazil is such a beautiful country and the complete opposite of what people think of it, yes there are favelas, but they're not on every corner, I find Brazil actually a safe place, and some people think I'm crazy for thinking that! But I'd like to thank Graeme Bird the chairman of D9800, Emanuel Tumino for choosing Brazil for me, John Lucas for sending the e-mail to my school and getting me into the program, my school co-ordinator, my parents for letting me go on this experience of a life time! And I would like to thank District 9800 for letting kids like me have an amazing experience! It really is a life changing moment all jammed into 360 odd days!



Nathan

Peta Antonello - Denmark

“Exchange – seize the opportunity – live the dream”

It feels like just yesterday I awoke on the 21st of January 2012 ready to embark on my big adventure. Hej my name is Peta Antonello, I'm 17 years old and I have spent the past 7 months in the land of the Vikings - Denmark.

When I was younger I dreamed of what it would be like to live in a different country, travel the world and see things beyond my normal life in Australia. My dream really set in after a school trip to China. My experiences in China left me itching to see more of the great wide world that surrounds us. I began to consider the Exchange program seriously after this trip and asked my Chinese teacher and parents about it a few times. It wasn't until a local Rotary member sent an email to my year level co-ordinator at school asking for anyone interested in Exchange that I felt my dream may finally come true. Soon enough my dream was becoming a reality and now I'm here in the cold yet beautiful country of Denmark.



During my time here the highlights have been - in my first week, waking up to look out my bedroom window to see the backyard covered in snow, I was so excited, my host sisters took me tobogganing and we made a snowman. Going on many family trips and seeing the sights of Denmark and also Switzerland, Northern Italy and Southern France. Visiting relatives in Copenhagen, were I saw such sites as the Little Mermaid and Amalienborg Slot (Princess Mary's home).

A special highlight was experiencing the beautiful sites of Europe with 43 other Exchangers from all over the world on the Rotary Euro Tour. I walked on streets and saw buildings older than anything I have ever imagined and immersed myself in a world of different foods, languages and culture. The Euro Tour was an amazing experience and something I will never forget. The Rotary Intro Camps have given me the opportunity to meet fellow Exchangers, I have made many new friends from all over the world, who I share an unexplainable bond with – a Rotary Exchange bond.

The history that surrounds Denmark and Europe is amazing. I feel privileged to be given the opportunity to attend one of Denmark's oldest schools, located in the oldest town in Denmark – RIBE. As I go to school every day I still look around and am amazed at the history that surrounds me. It's a bit like stepping into an olden day fairytale!

Language is the hardest challenge I have faced on Exchange but through hard work and help from my host families and friends it has come, I won't say it is perfect, but I am improving with each day. The feeling you get from being able to express yourself in a different language is incredible. I have three wonderful families here in Denmark, all of which warmly welcomed me into their lives and homes. When thinking of Denmark, it is not just my host country but my second home.

The best two words to describe Rotary Youth Exchange is "Life Changing". My year here in Denmark has been the greatest, most amazing, scary, life changing experience of my life. Not only does Rotary Exchange give us the chance to experience living in a country completely different to our own, it also give us the opportunity to make lifelong friendships with people from all over the world. Exchange has been the hardest experience of my life so far, but it has also been the best. I have learnt so much about myself, becoming mentally stronger, having the ability to cope with anything that comes my way. I always ensure I never say no to any opportunity offered to me. The confidence and knowledge I have gained in the last 7 months is something that can't be taught in a class room. I am forever grateful to have been given this once in a lifetime opportunity as an Exchange Student and would like to thank my parents, Rotary District 9800, Rotary Australia and the Danish Rotary.

Tusind tak alle sammen for give mig muligheden til at leve mine drømme og meget mere.
Thank you all for giving me the opportunity to live my dream and so much more.



Venice - in a gondola

Peta

Eliza Pettit - France

I'm Eliza Pettit and for the last seven months I've been living in Saverne a small town of 10,000 people. For me living in a small town has come with both advantages and disadvantages. One of the advantages is I have to speak French as not many people can speak English. The disadvantages are not hard to find as there is nothing to do, there are no shops for teenagers but the hardest thing of all is... I am alone. Although being the sole Exchange Student makes things hard, you realise . . .

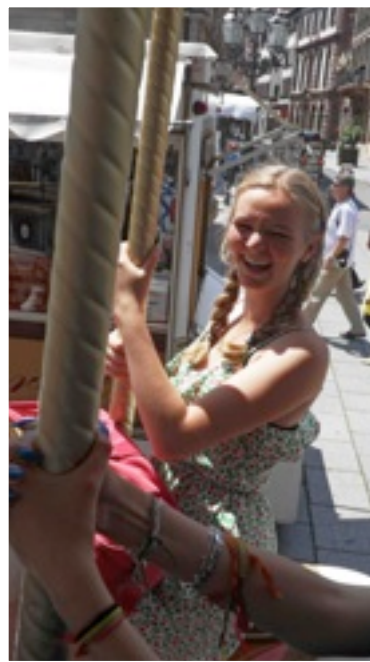
"You're braver than you believe, stronger than you seem and smarter than you think" - Christopher Robin

I grew up, got over myself, and started seeing things in a new perspective; it took time, but so do a lot of things in life. My turning point was on the 5/05/2012 a day just like every other but on this day I finally got the courage and took the plunge; I bought my train ticket by myself without any hassles, and travelled 50km by train to Strasbourg (the capital of Alsace) and spent the day with other Exchange Students. This one day managed to open my eyes and show me how I should be enjoying my Exchange, and I finally realised I didn't have to be alone.



From then on out my time started to fly by and so many wonderful opportunities seemed to come my way. I was able to spend a week in Italy with my cousins, which was amazing. I was only there for one week but I don't think we ever stopped moving visiting castles, buildings and beaches but most importantly we went shopping. I've visited Kelh the German city just across the river from Strasbourg one afternoon with fellow Exchange Students, you can take a city bus from Strasbourg, France to Kelh, Germany. At the start of my Exchange I found it bizarre that you could drive just 10 minutes and you were in a completely different country! During my summer holidays I took part in a Summer Camp organised by Rotary; the camp was based in Strasbourg but every day we went somewhere different in either Alsace or Germany. We went to castles, farms, potteries, theme parks and various cities. It was a wonderful experience with kids from all over Europe who could speak both English and French. During my summer holidays i experienced something magical - a three day trip to Disneyland with my host family. I'd always dreamed of going to Disneyland and finally I had the opportunity. Disneyland was fabulous, everything was so beautiful and perfect it was everything I'd expected and more. Disneyland really is the happiest place on earth, I never stopped smiling.





The Paris to Barcelona bus trip in February was amazing I could go on for hours talking about it. I made friends, saw amazing sights and had the time of my life. I can't wait for the Euro tour in a couple of month's time as it goes for twice as long and offers five new countries to explore. The Bus trips are great and within the rotary youth Exchange family you become close lifelong friends, just by hanging out you create spontaneous, new and unforgettable memories; from merry-go rounds to snowball fights.

Everything is new and different while you're an Exchange Student that's why you have to experience as much as possible; Exchange is about putting yourself forward and opening up to new possibilities. I know people who think Exchange is nothing but a waste of time, something that only puts off finishing VCE. I feel sorry for those people as they didn't even open up their mind to what Exchange could have been like for them. I know I've grown and matured as a person during my Exchange.

Student Exchange is hard to generalise but I think this quote sums it up perfectly:

"My theory is about moments, moments of impact. My theory is that these moments of impact, these flashes of high intensity that completely turn our lives upside down actually end up defining who we are. The thing is each one of us is the sum total of every moment that we've ever experienced with all the people we've ever known. And it's these moments that become our history. Like our own personal greatest hits of memories that we play and replay in our minds over and over again." – The vow (movie 2012)

Eliza

Stefan Vutov - Germany

It feels like it was yesterday when I applied for the Exchange. I had no idea how big and wonderful it can be. When I read about Rotary Exchange in the school newspaper, I had the feeling that I should go for it. I had no idea why I wanted it so much, but now I can say that was the best decision I have ever made.

Next thing I know I was in the airport, on my way to Germany. To be honest sometimes I doubted that I could ever make it that far but here I am now, in the country I've always wanted to go to. They say that Germany is one beautiful country, (and I have been watching so much about it on TV) but what I saw here is just amazing. It is totally different to what I am used to in Australia. I was a bit upset when I found out that I was going to a very small town because I expected to be sent in a big city like Melbourne but when I came here I realized that the life in the small villages is more relaxed and easy going than it is in the big cities.

It was the middle of the winter when I arrived at Frankfurt airport. There was no snow and that was disappointing because I expected to go out and build a snowman. However it was really cold. I should say



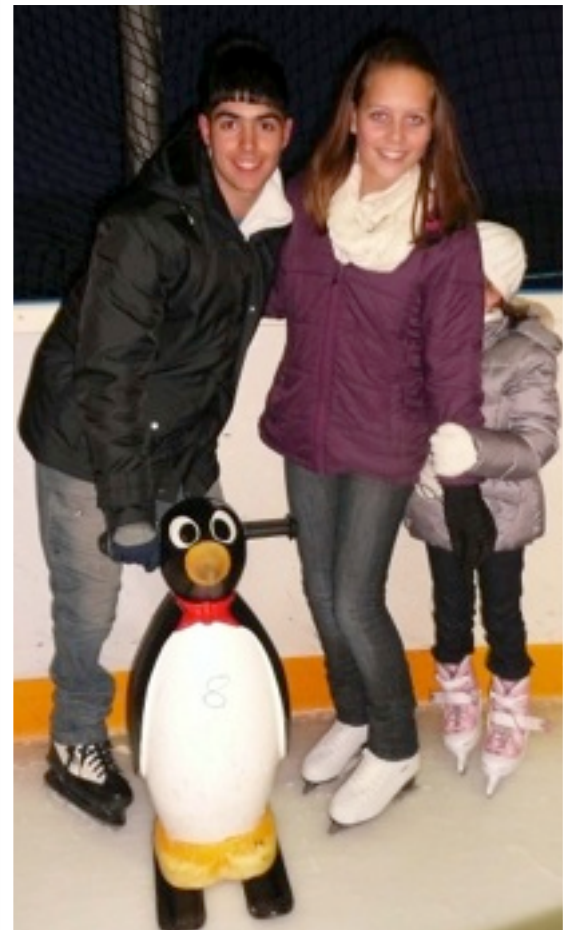
freezing, because when I left Australia it was about 35 degrees and in Germany it was -15. My host family had to give me some winter clothes because those I brought with me were not warm enough. I was taken out for a walk in the city on the very first day of my Exchange. It all looked so different. That's when I remembered what I have seen on TV. It was magnificent, knowing that all these places I have seen

and heard about are right there in front of my eyes.

What I found really interesting was the culture. I live in Bavaria, one of the states with the most famous German traditions. The very first night in Germany, my host family took me to a local Bavarian restaurant, where we had traditional pork sausages. Recently I was at an annual celebration in my village. I had the opportunity to see the traditional clothing, dancing and music.

I cannot believe that I have done so much in only 6 months. I have been to a few cities in Germany, visiting some cultural and historical places. My host family even took me skiing twice in the Austrian Alps. Those two holidays were the best in my life and I will never forget the amazing time I had up there in the mountains. I also attended a few Rotary camps, which I consider to be the best camps in my life because I met heaps of Exchange Students and made a lot of new friends.

People here are very friendly. I made quite a lot of friends. They don't often have many foreigners and get really excited when I say that I am from Australia. On my third day in Germany, I was sent to a big gymnasium. I felt like throwing myself into something big, having no idea what the consequences would be. I



hardly even knew the language and the only person I knew wasn't going to this school. I was attending a lot of events with my host family or friends. That gave me the great opportunity to meet new people and some of them will be life long friends which I can always come back to visit.

Exchange develops many skills. It gives me freedom but I always know that when I need help, my family, host family, Rotary Club and even my friends will be there for me. Most of the problems I have to handle on my own,



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and that prepares me well for further in life. The best part of going on Exchange for me is that nobody knows who am I, and I have to build up my character, which everyone will remember me for.

Rotary has given me the once in a lifetime opportunity to develop, meet new cultures and people, make new relationships and make the right choices in my life. The life I have in Germany is not a story I can write down on paper, nor can I describe what experience you get on Exchange. This is something I leave for you all to live through and enjoy every moment of your Exchange.

Thank you Rotary for this incredible opportunity!

Stefan



Claudia Guerrero del Solar - France

Not many people understand the life of an Exchange Student. Until you live it, having to leave your family, friends and sometimes more, for a whole year is harder than you can imagine. That feeling is mutual because after six months I want this experience to last forever. The change is a shock, but we adapt. We learn to adapt to everything. We learn that we are all just inhabitants of one planet, that in reality we are all the same. We learn not to criticise each other for where they come from because really we are all experiencing this change. Most of all we learn to become friends with people we never thought we would. It's like having to start your life again from a new house, new family, new school, new friends, and the hardest part of it all, a new YOU, having to change the way you think, see things and say things. You became more aware of how you sound and you pay more attention to what you are being told.

The first month here you wonder why am I doing this, what have I really gotten myself into, but as time flies, you think

that this is the best

decision you have ever made. Just knowing that that you're starting to learn a new language changes everything and once you have learned the language, maybe not perfect, but enough to have conversation and understand everything you are being told, that is when we don't want to leave this, but instead do it all again if we could. I wasn't upset with having to leave my home, I guess because I have already had to do it. I had to leave my family once and with time, you get used to it and it doesn't hurt as much. Instead, you think of all the positive outcomes and things of the future.

My first week is the one thing from the whole Exchange that I can never forget. I remember being so nervous when going into my first host family's house, not even at the airport, but at the house. So much goes through your mind and I was so confused with what was going on around me.

The first days of school are also something you can't forget. They go past so quickly you don't even notice all the people you meet. There were so many people I got introduced to (and the problem was remembering names), especially when you don't know any in the language you are trying to learn.





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I remember always getting very frustrated in the first 3 months at the fact I couldn't understand properly or speak whatsoever. Visiting the Eiffel tower in the first days I had arrived was something unforgettable and everywhere people were saying wow, ohhh, wow... the one thing that is the same in every language!

Meeting other Exchange Students is one of the most amazing things of the Exchange. You meet other students that are going through the same thing as you, so you make a friendship very quickly. My first month was spent with a lot of the Exchange Students. I was lucky enough to have another girl in my District going to the same school, which made it easier at the start. At school everyone is so nice, they are all so helpful and just want to talk to you to see how your experience is. You end up convincing so many students to do an Exchange, because it really is the most amazing thing you can do.

Changing families for the first time was hard, but once you change, it's like having to start all again, getting used to a new routine all over again. My second host family had 4 little boys, the oldest was 9 and the rest were 8, 4 and 3. That was a big change. I thought it would have been difficult living with them, but on the contrary, I loved every minute of being with them. The best thing about having a little host brother is that they always make you laugh and whenever you are upset, they are there for you to give you a hug. I spent my birthday with my second host family. It was a great night and we had all the Rotary Club over for dinner. The theme was Chilean food, which I really enjoyed doing for my Rotary Club. So all the Exchange Students at this point have left and it was hard spending a month without them. I got really attached to them and just the thought that I might not see them for a long time is hard. At this same time I was changing to my third and last host family. My host mum is also my Counsellor here in France. I think from all the families, this is the one family that makes me feel most at home and be myself. I have a little sister and 4 host brothers and one of whom is currently on Exchange in Australia.

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Just when I changed to my last host family, a member from another Rotary Club invited me to go to Switzerland for 8 days. I had the most amazing experience. Not only did I get to also experience the culture there, but also by surprise, he took us just to do some shopping in Italy in Milan - something I will never forget.



I haven't realized how quickly my holidays went past as I only have less than a week to start school again. Having to go pick up the new Exchange Students at the airport was great, having to meet everyone and seeing how it is for them when they arrive. It reminded me a lot of the day I arrived.

It's weird thinking that already 7 months have gone past, but it feels great at the same time because I'm happy I have learned the language, even though written French is so hard to learn and speaking it is much easier for me. I don't want my Exchange to end. It's going past so quickly. Only a few months and I will be home, but only one of my homes, because now I feel I have more than one home and a whole bunch of unforgettable and irreplaceable memories.

We don't all have the opportunity to do something as amazing as this and that is why I would like to thank you all for everything you have done for me and making this possible. I know it was not planned for me to come to France originally and I am so lucky to have the Rotary Club of Footscray as my Sponsor Club to make this dream come true. This is a once in a lifetime opportunity for me, so thank you to the Rotary Club of Footscray for this fantastic opportunity.

Claudia



Liam Oberin - Sweden

Hi my name is Liam Oberin, and in January 2012 I stepped on a plane that would take me on the biggest journey of my life, both in distance and in experience. I cannot believe it has already been 7 months which has been the best, craziest period of my life and I never want it to end!

Arriving in Sweden and coming out of the airport to snow and minus 20 degrees was unbelievable. I had never felt cold like it before. My host family picked me up at 3 pm and by 4 o'clock it was already dark. I couldn't believe it!

I have come to a small town of six thousand people in the middle of Sweden, called Anderstorp which is in a province called Småland. This was initially a bit of a shock, living in such a small close nit community where everyone knew everyone. It was a strange experience in the winter to leave for school at 8am when it was still dark and to come home at 4pm and it was dark again. At times it could be a little depressing but you just have to make yourself busy. In stark contrast in the middle of summer the sun only sets for an hour and it is still light outside much of the time, which makes it hard to sleep.

I have had the most incredible time in Sweden and I do not want to leave yet.

Rotary has provided an opportunity for me to meet a wide range of people that have become friends that I will have for life. The fellow Exchange Students that you meet are not just your friends, but they are your brothers and sisters! You share a bond with them that no one else can explain and it is simply amazing!

My Exchange has also opened my eyes up to the world outside of Australia. I have been able to travel up to the far north of Sweden inside the arctic circle, where I saw the aurora lights and went dog sledding! I had a ski trip for 4 days on a massive mountain that was simply majestic! I have been able to have close encounters with Swedish





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wildlife including wolves, which changed my life when one of them kissed me! Last but not least was the Euro tour, simply the most stunning 17 days of my life spent, with the most fantastic 65 people I have ever met! It is something I will never forget and something I will cherish for life, having been able to have the experience of travelling through Europe with such an awesome group of people!

This Exchange opportunity is a once in a life time experience and something that you cannot duplicate in any other way. I cannot thank Rotary enough for providing me this unbelievable experience. The Exchange year is the best year of your life, but It is filled with some tough times as well, but it is these times that I will look back on when facing challenges in the future and say to myself that this is not hard, I can do this, I was an Exchange Student!



Liam

Student	Country	Sponsor - RC of . . .
<i>Peta Antonello</i>	<i>Denmark</i>	<i>Bacchus Marsh</i>
<i>Madeleine Blair</i>	<i>Hungary</i>	<i>Keilor East</i>
<i>Ebony Gerrish</i>	<i>Germany</i>	<i>Essendon</i>
<i>Claudia Guerrero Del Solar</i>	<i>France</i>	<i>Footscray</i>
<i>Liam Holmes</i>	<i>USA</i>	<i>Essendon North</i>
<i>Amy Krasey</i>	<i>Japan</i>	<i>Glen Eira</i>
<i>Kyle Lappin</i>	<i>Norway</i>	<i>Bacchus Marsh</i>
<i>Liam Oberin</i>	<i>Sweden</i>	<i>Bendigo</i>
<i>Claire Pepin</i>	<i>Brazil</i>	<i>Laverton Point Cook</i>
<i>Eliza Pettit</i>	<i>France</i>	<i>Bendigo Sandhurst</i>
<i>Paul Reichelt</i>	<i>USA</i>	<i>Flemington</i>
<i>Nathan Turner</i>	<i>Brazil</i>	<i>Bacchus Marsh</i>
<i>Stefan Vutov</i>	<i>Germany</i>	<i>Fitzroy</i>
<i>Bonnie Wagner</i>	<i>Brazil</i>	<i>Bendigo</i>
<i>Ben Wilde</i>	<i>Japan</i>	<i>Brighton</i>
<i>Rufaro Zivave</i>	<i>Germany</i>	<i>Bacchus Marsh</i>
<i>Lilly Bridie</i>	<i>Denmark</i>	<i>Melbourne</i>
<i>Jennifer Lunn</i>	<i>Germany</i>	<i>Gisborne</i>



From those at home - just to let you know that you were not forgotten

Rotary Youth Exchange A Chance of a Lifetime! Host Families Invited Now!

Rotary Youth Exchange invites kind and caring Host Families within the community to assist local Rotary Clubs offer an outstanding exchange program to young people from all over the World.

A Host Family is a vital part of this cultural and educational exchange and typically hosts a student on a voluntary basis for a period of between 10 to 16 weeks. In doing so, a Host family officially becomes a Friend of Rotary International. The Host Family plays an integral role in offering the student the experience of a new culture and language, whilst at the same time learning itself about a different culture from a young leader. It is a direct window to the world for all members of a Host family. You not only share a young person's hopes and dreams, but more importantly, you make those dreams possible.

Hosting is the beginning of a lifelong friendship and connection with a student and family overseas. Whilst it can be challenging to help a young person transition to a new culture and ease into the surroundings, it is always fun and the rewards are immeasurable.

Host Families in the Rotary Youth Exchange program come in many shapes and sizes! Young children, older children, no children at all, extended families and older generations – all have been successful in hosting exchange students.

Please consider this amazing and rewarding opportunity now. Enquiries are most welcome.

Further information is available at www.rotaryyouthexchangeaustralia.com.au