

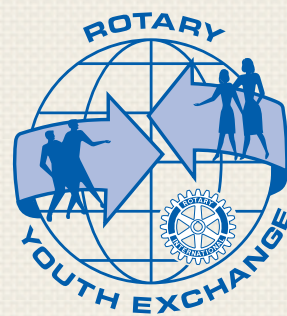
LETTERS FROM ABROAD 2013



EXPERIENCES AND IMAGES FROM OUR
OUTBOUND YOUTH EXCHANGE STUDENTS

2013

ROTARY INTERNATIONAL DISTRICT 9800 YOUTH EXCHANGE PROGRAM





2013 OUTBOUND STUDENTS

ROTARY DISTRICT 9800 YOUTH EXCHANGE COMMITTEE

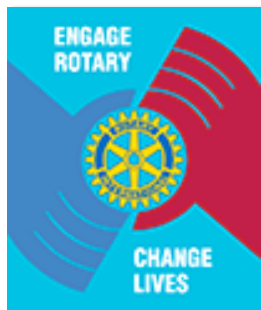
Youth Exchange Chair	Vanda Mullen	Web Master	Clifton Warren
Deputy Chairmen	Geoff Asher, Emanuel Tumino	Inbound Co-Ordinator	Geoff Asher
Secretary	Peter Lamping	Outbound Co-Ordinators	Margaret Paulsen, Garry Gunnell
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Treasurer	Peter Baker	Events Co-Ordinator	Joy Bruce
Insurance Officer	Geoff Asher	ROTEX Representative	Brett Riley
'Letters From Abroad' designed and published by . . .	Barry Mullen	'Letters From Abroad' Co-ordinator	Graeme Bird

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Brazil	Emanuel Tumino	Taiwan	Fabienne Nichola
Poland	Anne & Ed Brown	Hungary & Spain	Garry Gunnell
Finland, Norway & Sweden	Chris Drenen	Japan & Austria	Graeme Bird
Denmark & USA	Maria Silber	France	Gabrielle Morgan
Germany	Fay Lunn, Barbara Lamping		

DISTRICT 9800 REPRESENTATIVES

District Governor 2013 - 2014	Ross Butterworth
District Chair New Generations	Neville John



A Message From The District Governor

Youth Exchange is a program aimed at the personal development of our future generations. Our Rotary and Community Leaders of tomorrow require our support and guidance while they themselves grow and develop.

Rotary's investment today will ensure community service and a focus on helping others continues as a legacy to our children and their children for generations to come. Australian Rotary Clubs have supported Youth Exchange for many years and particularly in District 9800. This outstanding program faces challenges going forward and requires innovative thinking to maintain its rightful status as one of Rotary's finest programs.

Our Rotary International President, Ron Burton has long been a strong supporter of Youth Exchange and personally hosted many students. We believe Hosting not only strengthens the Host Family but also the Host Club whenever Clubs get engaged with the program; and of course it certainly changes lives. Many Thousands of lives have been developed and nurtured through the program and the program continues to be one of Rotary's highest profile programs worldwide.

As Clubs age a reluctance sometimes appears within Clubs, to accept inbound students and this reluctance can reduce opportunities to host students from overseas and yet we know when Clubs do host they are enriched by the culture of the students, by the energy of the students and by the rewards that come when you change someone's life.

We can continue such service in many ways and strategic partnerships are just one such way. With School students still keen to participate, with communities still wishing to send their young people overseas to gain the experiences living in another culture brings and with families wishing to add to their children's life experiences Rotary needs to continue our Youth Exchange Programs.

Rotary have many networks with which to form strategic partnerships with to ensure this valuable program remains a pre-eminent program of Rotary, we don't necessarily need to rely on our previous resources of Rotarian families for hosting; Communities around Clubs offer other opportunities to tap into for hosting including the Youth Exchange Alumni – families of returned students, families of students on exchange or other like-minded community groups such as Girl Guides Units and Boy Scout Troops.

Of course Clubs and Districts are continuing to explore new options to extend and grow this program. Various models of the Exchange Program are now appearing across the Globe and I encourage Clubs and Districts alike to explore the opportunities this offers.

On my travels around the District I have heard complaints that due to poor selection processes there are students due to their economic positions or personalities not deserving of the opportunities Youth Exchange

offers. Isn't Youth Exchange about development, showing the Students other aspects to life than what they have already experienced and encouraging them to move forward in positive ways?

Yes, sometimes District Selections at both ends do get it wrong but we do try and fix it when we know about it and co-operation and liaison with the District Committee can assist us to get it right.

Do you have an answer for hosting you have seen successfully operating elsewhere and would like to share ideas? Please drop me a line at districtgovernor@rotarydistrict9800.org and add to the opportunities we present to our future leaders.



DG Ross Butterworth

A Message From The Youth Exchange Chairman



As we prepare to launch Edition 4 of our much-acclaimed D9800 Youth Exchange publication 'Letters From Abroad', it makes us at the D9800 Youth Exchange Committee very proud indeed of the achievements of each of our Outbound Rotary Youth Exchange Students. It is pleasing to read of the diversity of opportunities and experiences that Rotary International has provided for each of our D9800 Students. On occasions, whilst on Rotary Youth Exchange, our students need to step out of their comfort zones, to manage a range of challenging issues. Each student often requires courage, determination and the network of support and expertise offered by Rotary International. At the outset, we like to instil in each of our students, as they prepare to travel, a sense of responsibility and resilience, which in many instances enhances their overall overseas experiences.

Rotary Youth Exchange is an educational and cultural exchange, which provides opportunities for students to live with Rotary approved 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 and Host Rotary Clubs 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.

Thank you to our 2013 Outbound Students for their contributions to 'Letters From Abroad' and I congratulate them for their excellent work as ambassadors for Rotary International, Australia, their schools and their families. As you read their inspiring stories you realise that Rotary Youth Exchange is a life changing experience and it promotes international peace, goodwill and learning. Grateful thanks to our Sponsor and Host Clubs for your support of D9800 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 our 'Letters From Abroad' Team for their excellent work and commitment to produce such an outstanding annual publication. Good luck to our students and families in your future endeavours and thank you for your valuable contribution to Rotary Youth Exchange.

Vanda Mullen

Chairman

D9800 Youth Exchange Committee

I've been living in Japan for nearly eight months now. In those eight months I have opened up to an entirely different culture, which is unique in just about every aspect. However in order to get here I had to make one of the biggest decisions I've ever made, to leave my home country (and everyone in it) to study abroad.

My country of interest has always been Japan. The culture has always fascinated me and the language has always been a hobby. The traditional buildings and elaborate ceremonies, among other things, are examples of an ancient way of life that lives on to this day. However, viewing the country from the perspective of an Exchange Student is vastly different to that of a visitor. Before I became an outbound, I had to consider this deeply. It wasn't going to be a holiday or a tour, it was an opportunity to steer my life in a new direction.

Initially, I found Japan a difficult country to settle in. The culture and mannerisms of the people starkly contrasted those of Australians. But I came to admire them very much. There's a greater sense of community, respect and consideration over here that should really be present in more countries. Foreigners aren't too

common in high schools over here, so it took a while to make friends. However, I met some amazing people who've made my Exchange so much more amazing. It's so important to socially reach out, as you will feel quite cut-off if you remain reserved.

I'm living in a city called Kanazawa (which can be translated to "golden marsh"), and there's no finer example of a city where traditional culture and modern culture live side-by-side. Adjacent to the tall office buildings and lavish boutiques are centuries old gardens, temples (a notable one, aptly named "Ninja Temple", contains concealed doors and traps!) and beautiful shrines. Living in Kanazawa, I have gained so much pride in my host country, as though it were my own country of origin. It's fantastic how convenient and efficient everything is. Everything is easily accessible and trains are unbelievably punctual. As a result, it doesn't take long for anyone to settle themselves into Kanazawa.

High School has been quite an experience. Japanese schools are separated into three stages: elementary school (Primary), middle school (years seven to nine) and high school (years ten to twelve). I attend "Hokuriku Gaku-in" high school, a

Presbyterian school founded over one hundred years ago. Most Japanese high schools only have one main building which contains all the year level classrooms, as opposed to the various 'block' buildings of Australian schools. What surprised me was the distance between boys and girls. Segregation by gender is pretty common in classes apart from PE, for example cooking and R.E. It seems to create a bit of a social barrier, yet everyone is very friendly. Japanese people have a lot of pride in their schools, and every day, a mandatory ten-minute cleaning of the classrooms and facilities by the students means it's always in a presentable condition.

It's all a very new lifestyle, but one that all Exchange Students learn to adapt to. There are always situations where you must use your own discretion to overcome issues, and your own initiative to make a positive change. Studying abroad definitely broadens your perception of the world, as you become a more tolerant and cultured individual. The life of an Exchange Student is never clear sailing, but in the end it's a very rewarding and fantastic experience.

Elliott



PHOTOS FROM MY YEAR



Holly Greenham ...

... Norway

I'm not quite sure where or how to begin to tell you about my year so far in Norway so let me start off by saying this:

I'm in love, not with a person but with this country.

Hei everyone! My name is Holly Greenham and I'm currently living in beautiful Norway!

It feels like just yesterday that I found out that I was coming here to Norway on Exchange. I was surprised to say the least. Ever since I'd applied for Exchange I'd had my heart set on the US. I've always wanted to go there and this was the perfect opportunity. When the time came to find out where we were going I remember everyone was sitting in a big group, it was late at night and we were all so tired but anxious to find out where we would be spending our year.

Names were being called and so far everyone had been given their first choice, I was one of the last names to be called and at that stage I was getting nervous. Finally, I heard not only my name, but the country I would be spending 12 months in too. Norway.

I was in a daze but I smiled anyway. I remember everyone being so excited,

calling their parents telling them the good news. I messaged my mum not knowing if I'd be able to call and actually get the words out that I wasn't going to the US but instead to a place I only knew as freezing cold and full of Vikings.

Turns out that coming to this freezing cold, Viking filled country was the best thing to ever happen to me.

I remember saying goodbye to my friends and extended family leading up to the day I left Australia, the 18th of January 2013. I remember saying goodbye to my parents and older brother at the airport in Melbourne just before I left; not once did I cry and I still haven't cried to this day but just thinking about leaving this beautiful country on the 12th of January 2014 makes me want to crawl into a ball and cry my heart out.

I remember arriving in Norway, meeting my host family and walking outside where it was -20 degrees and snowing...

I'd never seen snow before and it was the weirdest, most exiting feeling being in that kind of weather after leaving Australia on a 45 degree day.

I had to adjust to coldness and I learnt how to dress properly for that kind of

weather. Never again will I complain about it being cold once I'm home.

I'm living in a small country town that is very different from where I live in Australia but I wouldn't change it even if I could. I attend a school much smaller than my school back home but it's great, everyone was so welcoming when I first arrived and everyone including the teachers are all super lovely. I've had two amazing host families, met so many amazing people and done so many things I would never have dreamed about doing before Exchange.

One of the highlights of my time here in Norway would have to be EuroTour. I travelled with 34 other Exchange Students from all over the world to 9 different countries in 13 days. When I told people about the countries I went to most were very surprised, when thinking about Europe most people think of France and Italy, they don't think about Sweden, Estonia, Russia, Latvia, Lithuania, Finland, Poland, Germany or Denmark, which are the 9 countries I travelled to. I would never have imagined myself going to Estonia or Lithuania but I'm so glad I got the opportunity to do so; every country I went to was different yet beautiful in their own way and



My incredible (host) sister!



PHOTOS FROM MY YEAR

being able to share that experience with 34 others just like me was incredible.

Before leaving we were told that Exchange is one of the hardest things you can do - that is very true. You're leaving everything you know and starting all over again, living with new families, learning a new language, adjusting to weather and time zones; it can be tough. But it's totally worth it. This year has been literally life changing to say the least. I've learnt so much about myself, I've become 10 times more confident in everything I do and the amount of knowledge I have gained is incredible! I feel as though Exchange has made me become the best 'me' I can possibly be. I am forever grateful for this experience and I would just like to say a massive thank you to both district 9800 and district 2260 for giving me this unbelievable experience.

Holly



You can see why I don't want to leave . .



Just chilling in Berlin



All the amazing Exchange Students here in Norway!

Madeleine Lewon ...

... Germany

Moin Moin!

My name is Maddy, I am 18 and I'm living in a quaint town called Rendsburg in northern Germany. It's hard to believe that this time last year I was the one reading 'Letters from Abroad', marvelling at all the incredible experiences people had had during their Exchange year and that I'm now writing my very own! Eight months has passed since I arrived in Germany. It's funny how the beginning seemed to go so slow and now I'm trying to halt the incredible speed time seems to be going at now. In January this year I left the sweltering 45 degree heat in Australia to come to the somewhat unfriendly climate of Germany - a nice 18 degrees when I arrived! The first few weeks were incredibly overwhelming and I won't lie, weren't easy. School started immediately and on my first morning after riding my bike to school in the snow-rain and looking somewhat like a drowned-cat I shook everyone's hand nodding and half-smiling to people who were asking questions that required a 'no' answer and was quite overwhelmed, I never thought this place could feel normal.

I wondered for a few weeks what it was that persuaded me to leave everything behind for the unknown. It took me a while to find the answer and then to appreciate it, a little longer; the known is boring! Exchange gives you the opportunity to learn an entirely new way of life. It's an emotional rollercoaster, it will rip you from your comfort zone and then throw you to the sharks, but every moment is worth it. After I passed the initial excitement and then a week later the 'oh my goodness what are you doing in this strange place of meat eating, sock and sandal wearing, incredibly punctual people?' stages things began to get better. Slowly but surely I could order food in my new language, tell my host brothers and sisters how my day was at school and hand gestures were no longer needed when trying to figure out what I was going to eat at breakfast time.

A definite highlight came in May when sixty other Exchange Students and I ventured around seven countries in Europe in three weeks. We were able to cross countless things off our bucket lists and I know I speak for all of us when I say it was really the best

three weeks of our lives. From Germany to the Czech Republic, Austria, Italy, Switzerland, France and Brussels, we saw quite a bit of the world and experienced travelling in a way you only can with Exchange Students.

When I came back, Germany had transformed from a winter wonderland to a beautiful, lush, green and sunny place. The summer holidays then came and then I realised six months had already passed, I realised a huge change in my language skills, as if it happened over night, I could suddenly understand everything going on around me and I could join in without making mistakes! School started to become interesting because I wanted to go to school to talk to the friends I had made in the language that I can nearly speak fluently. You realise that you dream more in your second language than you do in your first and you find yourself forgetting words in your first language and only knowing them in your second. I have had incredible host families who I've laughed and cried with, who I've got to know better than people I've known for years, in just a few months. After



PHOTOS FROM MY YEAR



a while you begin to think that going home is now the daunting thing, where Exchange once stood because you've simply found your place in your host country.

I have learnt lots of things in my time away. I can't recommend a year abroad with Rotary more highly. It changes your perspective on the world and on life. I know now that with a strong will and a little bit of courage, I can do anything. I now have three sets of parents, eight brother and sisters and three houses I can call home on opposite sides of the world.

Rotary, I thank you with all my heart for this incredible, challenging, life changing experience that I will never forget.

Liebe Grüße aus Deutschland,

Madeleine



Madison Cammock ...

... Denmark

Hej, mit navn er Maddie, jeg bor i en by, der hedder Aabenraa, det ligger tæt på den Tyske grænse.

I sat down at school to write this letter and I have found it so hard, because how can you put into words a truly exciting, life changing adventure such as this?

Picking Denmark was one of my best decisions made yet, the people I have met, the places I have been, I can't imagine myself in any other country!

My year consists of unforgettable memories, parties, family trips, get-togethers, trips around Denmark and to Germany, travelling with friends, and exploring parts of Europe. And then the Eurotour – WOW what an experience!. It was with a group of 40 other Exchange Students and I have to say - I saw a whole new world and experienced life like never before in Australia. We had so much fun.

Life here has become very familiar I have to admit finally knowing your way around the whole city is soooooooo good!! I feel as if this is actually my new home and my host family is my new real family, not someone I'm just living with but people I care about and who make sure I'm always doing something, going to so much effort and making sure my time here is great, which I love and will be sad to leave. I

always find myself thinking about how great Denmark is with their little traditions and neighbourly gatherings. I will take back to Australia these traditions and enjoy showing my family the Danish way for things.

My first family, the Nielsen's are the most amazing people I have ever met - so loving, honest and down to earth! I lived on a small farm not far out of Aabenraa with sheep, horses, chickens and turkeys. I have experienced so much with that family, helping the sheep give birth, caring for the horses, cooking with my dad and swapping recipes while listening to Danish music, running, gymnastics and Zumba with my mum - they are some of my best memories. Whilst I was there we had to bottle feed 3 baby lambs - it was the best! There was one that I would cuddle and she would fall asleep in my arms laying on me, she was so small, eventually I got to name her and I thought my name starts with M so I want to name her with an M - "Milo" that is her name, she comes to me when I call recognising my voice, its amazing! Her mum was gorgeous too, so people friendly, I now consider this family my real family. I still go back and visit them every now and then. I love cooking with my family. I love just being there, I think one of the hardest things is moving to the next family but

its all about the different experiences you have with each one!

DGI, Landstævne: I was lucky enough to go to a town called Esbjerg, to experience one of the biggest gymnastic events in Denmark. I slept in a tent with my first host family; it was so extraordinary because I participated in an event where I got to walk with over 3,000 people through a stadium with everyone cheering for you - I have never seen or felt anything like it. Denmark is passionate about gymnastics, its so different to the Australian gymnastics, with mums, children, men, teenage boys, anyone and everyone doing it, a huge social activity. This was one of my most favourite times because it was an amazing experience and was something I'd never expect to see in Australia.

The life long friends I have made on Exchange is incredible, not only Danes but Mexicans, Brazilians, Americans, other Aussies, New Zealanders and people from Thailand, China, and Columbia.

Now just remember, a journey of 1000 miles begins with one single step.

I hope I have inspired at least one person to have this experience of a lifetime.

Madison



PHOTOS FROM MY YEAR



They tell you Exchange is a life in one year. When you're born you gradually grow and become the person that the society surrounding you has created and in a way forced upon you. Undertaking an Exchange Program gives you so much more than just the opportunity to learn about another culture and lifestyle – it gives you the chance to understand your own. To be removed from the confines of what has shaped who you are so far and define the aspects of yourself that otherwise would have been left unknown.

My Exchange has provided me with the absolute best things in life but also the most confronting challenges. I have a greater appreciation of the way I react to and understand the obstacles in front of me, more insight into what I am capable of and just how much I can achieve in life.

I am on Exchange in Brazil. I currently live in Belo Horizonte, a city of about 2-3 million people and attend a school with the student body being less than 200. In Brazil the national language is Portuguese; a language of rapid tongue and, lucky for me, a lot of body language. All of these factors have played a part in my confrontation with adversity. The fact I come from a town with approximately 10,000 people yet go to a school with about 1,300

students is just one of the absolute minor situations that I had to adapt to. Exchange is filled with these little aspects that we experience on a daily basis; from the language barrier to making new friends, to presenting yourself with pride and warmth as an ambassador for your country. These circumstances have brought out the best in me. Everyone who made this year possibly, everyone who has contributed to this positively incredible year, I can't thank you enough.

Brazil is a country full of natural amazement and spiritual beauty that is carried on by the people who were born and raised in this country, it stretches from the Indian tribes in the Amazon rainforest, the truly beautiful beaches in the northeast, to the southern rivers of Rio Grande do Sul. With the consideration of how amazing these people can be, it has been one of my greatest challenges to understand the way this country is in such a unfortunate state. The large division between the rich and the poor baffles me. Being here I had to grasp information that I definitely never had to consider to this extent.

Considering all these things, at times it gets difficult to be an Exchange Student. Constantly being scrutinized by curious bystanders and questioned

by people you don't understand. But with the bad always comes the good.

The beauty of the adversity is that they give us knowledge and appreciation of the simplest things. When making friends used to depend on your personality it now is the result of what language you can speak. When class was a matter of whether you wanted to go or not, now it depends on whether or not you can understand the timetable. Having to be extra cautious with what you do because you are unsure what your host parents really think about it, whereas your birth parents would usually give it to you straight.

These are the simplest of things that usually would never be given a second thought, now they become some of the most complicated tasks in your life. Doing all these things gives you the realization of just how simple things can be. We manage to complicate them in ways that are completely unnecessary but we just didn't realize it before.

Throughout my Exchange I have been privileged to experience these mental breakthroughs and also have the opportunity to witness spectacular places and culture. One of the most rewarding experiences was going on the Amazon Expedition. On the trip we saw some of the most amazing



natural creations in the world. Things such as hiking through the amazon rainforest at night, wading in and out of water caves and swimming under waterfalls as the night life breathes around you. We spent seven days on boats, sleeping in hammocks and boat jumping to get a meal. In the meantime we held sloths, alligators, snakes, met Indian tribes who live off the natural resources of the amazon and one night we spent sleeping in the forest. We swam in the river everyday and spent a lot of time resting on the boats with another 25 students from all around the world.

Along with that I attend school every week; this lifestyle is so different yet so similar. The overall aspect of what I do daily is the same, I go to school, hang out with friends sleep eat and then the many tourist moments. Greatly appreciated holidays to small waterfall towns where you rent a horse for your way of transport and to marvellous surreal blue beaches in Cabo Frio and Rio de

Janiero have been the different and highlighted parts of my lifestyle here compared to my Australian life but when I'm lying on the white sand or galloping a horse along a dirt track, wind in my hair, towards a beautiful waterfall, I don't think anything could get much better than that.

I cannot help but compare my lifestyles, which in turn gives Exchange the title of a life in a year. This Exchange has changed my views on everything. Given me realization and gratitude of the simplest things in life. Helped me understand the beauty that surrounds me no matter where I am. The appreciation of what I have always had and always will have. And most importantly supplied me with the greatest memories and most incredible of friends, which I will keep forever close to my heart. My life had begun before my Exchange, it just took my Exchange to realise that and make the absolute most of it.

Pearl

PHOTOS FROM MY YEAR



My name's Shanti Benson, I'm sixteen years old, from Melbourne Victoria, living in a Swedish speaking town in the South-West of Finland and my life could not be better.

Boarding that plane on the 18th of January 2013, was one of, if not, the most terrifying things I have ever had to do. I wasn't terrified about the flight, but rather what lay ahead of me in this one daunting year. From the time I left Melbourne to when I landed in -30° at the Helsinki airport, all that was going through my head was 'What am I doing?' 'Why am I doing this?' 'This isn't for me!' 'This was a stupid idea'. But I don't think I have ever been so wrong in my life. These past seven months have been the most amazing, rewarding, terrifying and challenging. But I wouldn't trade it for anything. I have met the most amazing people, been to so many culturally rich places and have memories that will last a lifetime.

I decided to go on Exchange because I had lost all the colours in my life. Everyday was always the same, a grey blur. I would dream about a different life, one where I would get up everyday wondering what might happen or what I might do, hoping one day I would have a love for life. I thought that Exchange was the best way to make this happen, so I applied not really knowing how many amazing things would happen in this one year. Exchange has put the colours back into my life, and I know that even when I go back to Australia the colours will still be there.

There are many things you learn on Exchange whether that be from experience or advice. Being quite a distance from your family and everything you know really makes you appreciate your family and life in Australia, but for me it also gave me a clearer picture of my life. With the past and the future. There are many things that throughout this year I have

learnt about myself, and by learning these things I feel like they can help me to become the best person I can.

Exchange has been amazing, there is no doubt about it, but there are many aspects that make it challenging. For me personally I haven't found homesickness to effect me as much as I thought. But the adjustment into a 'Finnish' life was probably the toughest. Before you leave for Exchange there are many many months of preparation, and throughout those months of hearing stories from past and present Exchange Students, I had subconsciously formed a light idea what my Exchange would consist of and how it would run. But as my Exchange started I was so completely wrong and that threw me off quite a lot. But as I worked on it, things got easier. I know that the rest of my Exchange won't always be easy, but I do know that it will be worth it.

Shanti



PHOTOS FROM MY YEAR



Sherrin Wright ...

... France

“So wake me up when it’s all over, when I’m wiser and I’m older, all this time I was finding myself and I didn’t know I was lost”

It’s been almost 7 months since I left Melbourne Airport on that January afternoon. 7 months and it only feels like a few weeks. My name is Sherrin Wright and I am currently living in France.

This year has changed my life, I found new families, new friends, a new language and a new me. Being only 15 when I left Australia, there were people doubting how I would cope and if I was mature enough for Exchange. Now while I sit here writing this I realise exactly how much I have changed, I am less shy, I’m more confident and my English spelling skills are not as good as they used to be!

My first journey overseas. I can definitely say that it is one I will never

forget; delayed flights, 3 hours waiting in line to rebook, lost luggage. After a very tiring, stressful journey I arrived at the train station in Dole, where there was my host sister, my host parents and my counsellor, all welcoming me with open arms.

The time flew by so fast, sitting here thinking about the amazing things I have done and memories I have made is incredible; I travelled Europe, I went to Barcelona, I met the other Exchange Students, I changed families multiple times, went on an amazing summer camp and made friends from all over the world.

Rotary Exchange Students are all over the world and you never know when you will run into them quite literally. I was skiing with my first host family, when my host dad heard somebody speaking English, we all ended up going over and speaking to her. She was an

Exchange Student from Canada who was off skiing for the weekend. We met a couple times after that; the most memorable was when we went hiking up a mountain and if we stood on one side of the fence we were in France and if we stood on the other side we were in Switzerland.

Being an Exchange Student is something truly amazing that words can’t describe. You will meet another Exchange Student and you can be sitting there for hours just talking; it’s an instant bond just being Exchange Student. Once you meet people from around the world you start realising how small the world is. Exchange Students are just one big family.

‘Friends may come and go but family is forever’

Sherrin



PHOTOS FROM MY YEAR



Ella Toll . . .

. . . France

Exchange was fabulous. It was a lightning fast rollercoaster of emotions and learning and love and tears. But it was fabulous.

An experience I will value for the rest of my life.

On Exchange I learnt a new language and a new culture. I arrived completely alone and I filled my world with new people that I now love. I got completely lost and I found myself again.

The start of Exchange for me, was tough. I got really bored, for like ages. Boredom was probably the thing I was least prepared for.

Thing is, I arrived, as everyone does, with nothing. No routine; no access to the people and things I usually filled my life with. So at the start, I didn't know what I could possibly do with myself, hence the boredom. However, the cool thing about Exchange is that you arrive with a blank page; and from a blank page, you draw your world.

I would say my greatest memories from my Exchange in France, came from my 3 month summer holidays. They started with my Eurotour. 11 days, France, Germany, Czech Republic, Austria, Italy and Switzerland. After that I had a friend stay over; we visited all of Paris. Then I caught the bus to Belgium, stayed there for a

week. Then it was Germany, another week. Hungary, 9 days. Then it was the south of France and Barcelona for two weeks. Travel Travel Travel. It was the summer of my life, I loved every second.

When I was chosen as a Rotary Exchange Student a whole new world opened up to me. Because of Exchange, I formed relationships that I will treasure my whole life. I unlocked strength, I never imagined I had and I gained maturity and perspective. Exchange has undeniably, without a doubt, changed my life.

Ella



PHOTOS FROM MY YEAR



Gabriela Giggins ...

... Denmark

Now that I have been living in Denmark for nearly 11 months, I believe I have acquired the experiences and knowledge to allow me to truly understand the quote; "One year in a life time, one life time in a year." Every single day there is something that happens that just amazes me to the point of disbelief. I am constantly astonished by everything I see and do. When I remember to remind myself that I am actually LIVING in Europe - I tend to flip out a bit. I have fallen totally in love with my life this year.

Living in Denmark has its advantages when it comes to travel. Because it lies on the top of Europe and the bottom of Scandinavia, it is so close to all those places that I once dreamed being in. In fact, it is so easy I found myself in London within my second month. After that, I went on my Eurotour with my Exchange Student friends, Norway with my third host parents, Rome with my fourth host families siblings and sometimes I go to Sweden for a McFlurry. It is so strange to live in a place where one can travel to other lands in the same time it takes to drive to school every day.

With this new life and beginning here in Denmark, I have been able to experience and learn so much. I have lived with four very diverse families, giving me the opportunity to experience life here on all different levels. I have discovered Copenhagen in a way that not many can experience on a regular holiday. I have established my regular spots; cafes, second hand shops and kebab vans alike. As I look back on my year, I can remember one of my favourite memories was relaxing on the roof of my second host family's apartment block, overlooking the whole of Copenhagen city, knowing that this is a view only a few people are lucky enough to witness.

As much as I love the winter weather, summer was really the best time for Denmark. In my long, luxurious summer holiday, I spent almost every day in one of Copenhagen's oldest theme parks, Tivoli, exploring the beautiful Tivoli gardens. I would meet my friends on the bank of the famous Nyhavn harbour to eat ice-cream and then walk to a hide-away pizzeria that we all dubbed 'our place'. I joined my friends and family at various music festivals around the country. I

attended concerts almost every Friday, Danish bands and others. I started the quest to find the best flødeboller, which also included the act of purchasing stretcher pants. I attended various birthdays, confirmations, class parties and family get togethers. Summer holds some of the brightest memories for me over this Exchange.

When I truly think about it, my time in Denmark has been extraordinarily difficult, but completely rewarding. Especially now, when the date of my departure sneakily creeps up on me, do I realise how good it is to be here. It is sad to think that I have worked so hard, all year through, to learn the language, the traditions, the customs, all of the words to my friends childhood songs; and now it is all coming to an end. It is sad knowing that when I return to Denmark and what I have created for myself here, it won't be the same. It is sad to leave my best friends and second families, my school and my class, my marching band and swimming club. Ending my Exchange will be sad and hard. But something I have realised while hosting my last family 'Australian' themed



dinners, and saying my final goodbyes to all of my families relatives, is that I am not scared of its end, however hard it may be. As I walk away from all of those things, I realise I am only excited for the new beginnings that wait for me in the future. I am eager to experience all the new opportunities that I will find when I return to my home.

Though now, right at this moment, I find myself wearing three pairs of stockings under my jeans; clear proof that winter has returned. But just like last time, it is nicely accompanied by a big cup of hot chocolate, whipped cream in a can and a cosy 7 o'clock bed time. Even though the rest of my time in Denmark can be measured in just a few short weeks, I am determined make the most of this wonderful experience.

Gabriela

PHOTOS FROM MY YEAR



Caroline Billington ...

... Poland

Hi, I am Caroline, my host country is Poland and this is my confession!

I have really procrastinated about this letter...mainly because i have no idea how to sum up my experiences of the last year into a few paragraphs. I have come to the conclusion that it simply can't be done, but because I am so eager for everyone to know how wonderful and life-changing this year has been for me, I have decided to do the impossible!

When you say goodbye to your family, get onto a plane and go to another country for another year, you know you have to be a strong person. I thought I knew what I was in for when I signed up for Rotary International Youth Exchange, but what I have experienced is so much more rewarding, life-affirming and terrifying, than anything I could have ever foreseen.

When I set off from Melbourne airport, on the 18th of January, 2013, I was excited and even though I was more than a little scared of spending a year away from my mum, I felt ready and eager to see the great wide world!

Arriving in Poland was the most wonderful feeling. After 30 hours of travel I finally hauled myself off the plane and was greeted by the wild cheers and warm smiles of my host

family and the other Exchange Students.

Those first three months were definitely the hardest. Learning such a tough language as Polish, struggling to make friends and the bitter cold, all came together to make one heck of a ride, but to this day I am proud to say that I stuck at it and came out on top.

I have had four host families this year and each has had it's ups and downs. But, drama in a family is natural and I can't thank any of them enough for looking after me the way they did. I want to just take a second now to say a huge 'thank you', to all the host families around the world, who take an Exchange Student into their home, make them part of the family, by showing them a love and concern that we as Exchange Students can only strive to repay. I want to thank the Kmieciks', the Kaczmareks', the Wroneckis' and the Orkuszs' for taking me under their wings and keeping me cosy and safe throughout my Exchange.

This year I have both literally and figuratively, climbed mountains, travelled great distances and learned some of the most poignant life lessons imaginable. If wishes really could come true, I would wish to live this year again and not change a thing!

I feel like part of a huge family that I never knew existed before I became an Exchange Student and for me, a people lover, it is the best gift I have taken away from Exchange.

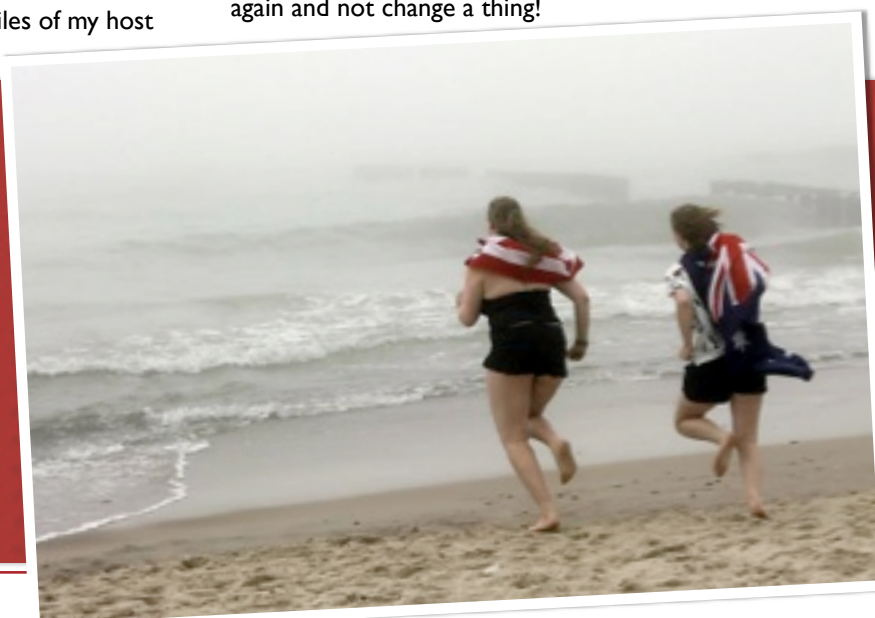
I have developed a self-confidence to rival even that of Iron-Man, or Dame Edna. I could honestly look anyone in the eye and say, "I can do anything I put my mind to, because I spent a year away from home at the age of 15 and I bloody well survived!"

I am definitely Polish now, I no longer feel like the innocent little Aussie who left. I believe that when I return I can proudly say I am an honorary Pole, a true Australian and part of a group of people with whom I can only pray I can remain in touch with.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Without the help of Rotary, I would never have met these people, had these experiences, learned this language or believed in myself the way I do now. I am so full of gratitude, I feel I might explode, so thank you for everything!

The only hurdle I have to leap now is the culture shock of returning home. I know it's going to be a swift kick in the stomach. But, heck! What can't I do? I can speak Polish for crying out loud!

Caroline



PHOTOS FROM MY YEAR



Shari McKenzie ...

... Germany

My name is Shari, I am 18 years old and I currently have just spent 10 months living in Germany.

My Exchange year was the most scary, amazing, testing thing I have ever done in my life. Although, I can honestly say this year has been the best year of my life, I wouldn't change a single thing about it. I am proud of the person I became as a result of everything that happened throughout the year.

Before you go on Exchange, the Rotarians all tell you it's not all just fun and games, and it takes a certain type of person to go and complete an Exchange. At first when they told me, I thought to myself, oh it can't be that hard, I get to live away from home for a year, what could be better than that? Soon I did realise exactly what they were talking about.

I remember my first week in school -

every time I walked into a classroom all eyes would be on me. It was such a strange feeling to walk around, having everyone know your name, but you not knowing anyone's name.

Germany allowed me to grow so much as a person mentally, (not so much physically I'm still as short as I was before I left). I have learnt how to deal with so many different situations, I know for a fact I have become so much more independent and mature, and I am very grateful for that.

Going on the Europe Tour with 30 other Exchange Students, travelling around 3 weeks on a bus really does test your sanity. In saying that, I can proudly say I learnt to love the bus.

This year I met some of the most amazing people, and I will without a doubt see them all again. Germany has

given me the travel bug, so when I finish my studies, I plan to go to South America to see my Exchange Student family.

If anyone is thinking about doing an Exchange, I wouldn't think twice about telling them to go for it. It will probably be the best thing you do in your life. You make friends all over the world, and apart from that, you also have families in your host countries that you will constantly want to go and visit. You become close to your host families and learn to love them like your real family.

Thank you Bendigo South Rotary Club 9800, I am forever grateful for being given this amazing opportunity. I will never forget this year.

Shari



PHOTOS FROM MY YEAR



Ever since I was little, I've wanted to travel the world. I collected postcards and stuck them on my wall whenever relatives would travel. For my 12th birthday, I spent all my Christmas money on a book that weighed almost as much as I did that contained photos and facts about every country in the world. So hearing I was chosen to live in Brazil for a year was probably the best piece of news I ever heard.

When you tell people you're leaving for an Exchange, they call you lucky and tell you to enjoy your holiday, but it is so much more than a holiday. I've been on holidays overseas before and Exchange definitely does not fit in the same category. The huge difference, for me, is actually being a part of this whole new, exciting, (sometimes weird) culture. By living, studying and making best friends with the people of Brazil and living life their way (basically because I don't have any other choice), is so interesting and rewarding. It's the main thing that separates you from the tourists.

My name is Jess, I'm 17 and I've spent the last 10 months of my life in Brazil, in a town called Campos dos Goytazes. It's not the most glamorous city in all of Brazil, but it doesn't need to be for me to love it. It is extremely Brazilian and cultured and the people are always excited to take me places and show me things, because it is not often that foreigners come here. My favorite thing about my city though, is that its just a few hours from the famous Rio de Janeiro, the coolest and most interesting place I've ever been. My first day was spent in Rio and as overwhelmed, jet lagged and tired as I was, I remember I fell in love with that city instantly.

I have been lucky enough to have traveled a lot in my time here too. The Amazon rainforest trip for 2 weeks with 60 other Exchange Students, taking a boat underneath Iguazu Falls and seeing the most beautiful beaches you could only imagine, have been just a few of the stops I have made along the way.

After hearing that, yes, you could say I have been pretty lucky. But it's not all just about the good times. In no way would I say it is an easy year. Exchange can be the best, but hardest year of your life. But how easy and how much you enjoy it all depends on you and how much you are willing to adjust to everything new. Adjusting for me, honestly, was difficult at the start. My family were extremely different to my family in Australia and the way they did things just didn't make sense to me. My new friends I was making at school knew about 30 words in English that they could use with me, so our conversations were pretty limited. I disliked the music, food and I couldn't understand a word of their language. But as I learned to accept their way of things, I learned to love Brazil like I've never loved another country. And all the things that annoyed me at the start are the exact same things I am in love with now.

Something else that is an important factor of my Exchange, is the other



PHOTOS FROM MY YEAR

Exchange Students. The bond you can create with other Exchange Students in such a short amount of time is incredible. You feel like you already know so much about them, even before asking their name. In my town, I have 3 other Exchange Students through Rotary and we are always helping each other out whenever needed.

So far in my Exchange, I have learned a huge amount of important things - about myself, about Brazil, about other countries, from the Exchange Students, or from people I have met and about always being open-minded and willing to try new things, because that is when the most awesome things in life happen.

It all comes down to just rolling along with the unexpected and not having crazy expectations. Exchange for me was not quite like I imagined, but I am still honestly having the best time of my life. Exchange is the opportunity of a life, not a prize and what you do with it is up to you.

I am so proud to be an Australian Rotary Exchange Student and I thank everyone that has helped make it possible.

Jessica



Student	Country	Sponsor - RC of . . .
<i>Shanti Benson</i>	<i>Finland</i>	<i>Balwyn North</i>
<i>Caroline Billington</i>	<i>Poland</i>	<i>Glen Eira</i>
<i>Jessica Burch</i>	<i>Brazil</i>	<i>Eaglehawk</i>
<i>Madison Cammock</i>	<i>Denmark</i>	<i>Bendigo</i>
<i>Pearl Gow-Svenson</i>	<i>Brazil</i>	<i>Castlemaine</i>
<i>Holly Greenbam</i>	<i>Norway</i>	<i>Footscray</i>
<i>Madeleine Lewon</i>	<i>Germany</i>	<i>Bendigo Strathdale</i>
<i>Shari McKenzie</i>	<i>Germany</i>	<i>Bendigo South</i>
<i>Jessica Munday</i>	<i>USA</i>	<i>Flemington</i>
<i>Elliott Neagle</i>	<i>Japan</i>	<i>Essendon</i>
<i>Ellajaz Toll-Bujeya</i> <i>(Ella Toll)</i>	<i>France</i>	<i>Bendigo</i>
<i>Sherrin Wright</i>	<i>France</i>	<i>Castlemaine</i>
<i>Gabriela Giggins</i>	<i>Denmark</i>	<i>Bendigo</i>

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