

Rotary Youth Exchange Long Term Exchange Testimonials

Jonah Steiss in December 2023 reflecting back on his Rotary Youth Exchange in 2015-16 in Neuquén, Argentina

I embarked on a transformative journey with the Rotary Youth Exchange (RYE) program in the fall of 2015, fresh out of high school and uncertain about my career path in teaching. By choosing to take a gap year in Argentina (without fully grasping the profound impact it would have on my life), I discovered my purpose through the rich experiences in Argentina.

Cultural immersion became a guiding force during my time in there, where I navigated through cultural nuances, made many mistakes, and developed a profound appreciation for viewing the world through diverse perspectives. The term "different perspectives," often mentioned by educators, adults, religious figures, and fellow Rotarians, took on a tangible meaning. As an exchange student, I learned that my host country would enlighten me on seemingly mundane aspects of life like crossing the street, how to take a cab, or how the topics discussed at a barber shop led to more meaningful human connections. Additionally, powerful lessons on humanity, interpersonal connection, and the influence of a new language on thought and behavior unfolded before me.

Armed with these newfound perspectives, I have been teaching Spanish for four years at the high school level. Thanks in part to the confidence instilled by RYE, I recently took a bold step, moving across the country to pursue teaching at a school that resonates with my passion. In my classroom, I strive to impart these invaluable perspectives to my students. These firsthand experiences have made me a more empathetic and effective teacher, as well as a better friend, son, brother, and uncle. The Rotary Youth Exchange program has not only equipped me with language skills but has also enriched my life with a profound understanding of diverse cultures, fostering a global perspective that continues to guide and inspire my personal and professional journey. And hey, at the end of the day, you get to travel to really cool places, laugh a lot, and eat incredible food.



Zoe Frentress in December 2023 reflecting back on her 2014-15 exchange year in Denmark

I often reflect on the long-lasting and incredible memories created from my 2014-2015 Rotary Youth Exchange in Denmark. It was a unique experience which taught me more leadership skills than I can count on my 10 fingers! I wrote about these skills on my college essay as I applied to higher education. As I was applying to universities and colleges, I realized the schools want the exact same leadership skills which I learned from my exchange experience. To name several of these skills, communicating in a different language, thinking critically, and being open minded are a few of the qualities schools want in their student body. I learned all of them in just one year living abroad! Schools not only want these leadership skills to make up their student body, but also employers in career fields. In my professional career, I mentor young adults ages 16-29 in a multicultural setting where the English language is the minority. When I am at work, I use these skills on a daily basis. The decisions I make are vital because they directly impact the people who work for me. When I hire someone, I choose someone who is a good communicator and I look to employ strong critical thinkers. I want employees who are open minded meaning they are open towards new ideas, viewpoints, and arguments. These leadership skills are so important to develop and they are another tool to have for personal growth. I know I would not be the best leader today without the opportunity to explore the world on behalf of the Rotary Youth Exchange program.

.....

Reflections From 2018-19 Exchange Student: Written in 2019 by Phoebe Hoag upon her return from France



Skiing in the Alps



Enjoying time with other students in my Rotary District

“My name is Phoebe Hoag. I am a senior at Inter-Lakes High School. For my junior year in high school I lived in Cannes, France for the entirety of the academic school year through the Rotary Youth Exchange Program. Choosing to leave everything I knew behind and to spend the year in a different country was the best decision I have made. By being fully submerged into

another culture at the age of sixteen instantly opened my eyes and taught me so much about others as well as myself. This past year I met so many amazing people throughout my journey from all over the world that I will have life-long friendships with. In addition, I experienced so many incredible experiences such as touring Europe, skiing in the Alps, attending the Cannes Film Festival and much more that I will cherish forever. Going on an exchange has been the most challenging thing I have ever accomplished but also the greatest experience that I will carry with me for the rest of my life. This is an amazing program through a great organization that I highly recommend to anyone who is curious.”