

This was my first full month abroad, and I think it has forced me to grow as a person more than I ever have before. I've struggled the most with my first host family. It wasn't a loving or caring environment. As a result, I never felt comfortable going to my host parents with any issues. Luckily I had my counsellor, David, who was there for me every step of the way.

In the beginning we tried to work through some of the smaller issues. For example, my host sister, Hayley, was not nice to me and would not speak to me for weeks on end. When she did speak to me, it was often to say mean things to me. So I tried to get more involved in the house to show I wasn't a guest, and also participated in more activities so I wasn't always in her space. It didn't work too well though. Then later my other host sister, Carly, stopped speaking to me. This was particularly difficult for me because I considered her my best friend here in Australia, and I then felt very alone. I decided to confront her about it, and we just talked for a couple hours about anything. During our conversation she asked me something about my life. It genuinely confused me because I realized it was the first time anyone in the family asked a question about me.

This realization made me realize how isolated I was within the family. I had lived with these people for about two months and I wasn't sure if they knew my last name or if I was from the United States or Canada. They didn't want anything to do with me unless it was convenient for them. It's a shame because I really think I could have contributed to the family. But it got to a point where staying with the family was not good for my mental health.

David and I then spoke to my YEO, Allan, and we were granted permission for me to leave the family. The next evening David came over and spoke with my host parents. They were



not happy, but it could have been a lot worse. So I left and am now staying with David and his family until I move on to my next host family.

I've been with David and his family for less than a week, and I already feel so much better. They welcomed me straight away without any hesitations. They always want to know more about me and share their experiences with me. I've found I'm even just smiling more. While the process of switching host families was very difficult, I think it was the best decision I could have made. My last family was really the only thing dragging down my exchange.

School has been really fun. It was the end of the term for students, so all my friends had exams, but I could just hang out. My math and chemistry teachers were the only ones who asked me to take their exam, and they both told me they wanted to scare the other kids in the class with the fact that I was able to do better than them. I got to go to the school disco and participate in the year 12 muck-up day, where I ended up drenched by water balloons and covered in shaving cream. I've also gained some great friendships a few of my classmates and one of my friends is now just down the road from me.

My rotary club has also been amazing. They've been very supportive throughout my switch and wanting to help in anyway possible. My club president, Elizabeth, was very upset about the situation I was put in and is now my counsellor while I stay with David. She was right there to cheer me up and has decided she will do whatever she can to make the rest of my exchange wonderful. A couple rotarians who have been out of town while I have been going through all of this emailed me just to check in and make sure I was doing better. All the other exchange students were there for me as well. They would send me encouraging texts and offered



for me to come stay with them for a bit. All of this just proved to me that I was wanted here in Australia, and that I can't let one set of horrible people bring me down.

It's unfortunate that this had to happen, but I'm also kind of glad that it did. I faced my first real roadblock on exchange and I was able to overcome it. I also think that it will help me a lot when I go to my next families. I now know what I need from a host family and how to handle negative situations. However, I've met the rest of my families and I think they will all be good places for me to be. I also now don't have anything holding me back from doing anything less than completely enjoying my time here.

