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Paula Versiani is quickly mastering the English language.

Andrea Johnson photo

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## From Brazil to Quesnel

By Andrea Johnson - Quesnel Cariboo Observer

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Paula Versiani walks through the doors of the rink and steps onto the ice.

In front of her are six vast sheets of the frozen stuff, each end painted with red and blue rings representing the house.

She's never seen anything like it before.

Her teammate encourage her to walk to the other end to get a feeling for it.

She shivers at that thought. Walking on ice? She only bought a winter jacket, wool gloves and a warm head band to cover her ears earlier that day and now she's being told to walk on ice?

She can't quite comprehend the game she's about to play.

She wobbles closer to the hack, broom in her left hand.

She squats down and delivers the rock, it doesn't make it past the hog line at the other end. But that's OK. She'll get the hang of it.

Soon she's laughing and giggling with her teammates, making better shots than her skip can muster.

They lose the game, but that's OK. Next time they will win, she promises.

That's quite the promise coming from a teenager from Brazil, who until Friday night had never even heard of curling.

Versiani is a 16-year-old Rotary Youth Exchange student from Belo Horizonte, an inland city of three million an eight-hour drive from the country's largest city of Sao Paulo.

Between now and July, she's staying with a variety of host families that belong to Quesnel Rotary and Sunrise 2000 Rotary Clubs.

Last year, she applied to become a Rotary Youth Exchange student.

She took test after test and endured several long interviews.

She didn't know which country she'd be sent to if she was accepted. Three months later she had a choice between Canada or Japan.

She chose Canada. That turned into B.C. and that turned into Quesnel.

She didn't know much about the country, except that it was big and its official languages are French and English.

She thought Quesnel didn't even exist after searching for pictures, even its location on atlases. Fluent in Portuguese, she didn't even know how to pronounce the Gold Pan City's name.

She knew Canada could be cold. Brazil basks in the warmth of the southern hemisphere after all.

But she wanted new experiences, to learn a lot of things not just about herself but a new language and culture. She wanted to grow and become more mature.

In early August, she said goodbye to her parents, her 14-year-old brother and 20-year-old sister. She flew from her home city of Belo Horizonte to San Pala to Toronto to Vancouver and finally to Prince George.

After 28 hours on plane, she arrived Aug. 7 and greeted by Rotarians Liz and Petrie Neaves.

When she walked off the plane, the sun was shining – it was 10 p.m. She couldn't believe it, it gets dark between 6 and 7 p.m. in Brazil.

Exhausted, she slept the next day.

She hung out with the Neave's, going to Barkerville, Tweedsmuir Park and meetings.

Sept. 2 she started Grade 12 at QSS.

It was completely different.

In Quesnel she only had to choose four subjects and realized early on she'd already done some of the course work in math three years ago in Belo Horizonte.

In Brazil, it's 15 subjects all year, a year that stretches from February to November.

She studied written English at home, but she's quickly getting up to speed in her oral skills.

After two months, she's still not feeling comfortable as she's getting to know more and more people. But she knows it'll happen.

She wants to experience winter and wants to figure skate. She's only ever seen snow in New York.

"I miss everyone, I left my life behind," she said.

"Things are completely different, the people, the time the sun goes down. Things I could count on aren't there anymore. Everything is new. I don't have friends or family to be with."

But every day she's learning more about life in Quesnel.

She's played golf. She's canned salmon and she's learning to curl.

Not much more Canadian than that.

### **Are you ready to...**

- act as an ambassador for and educate others about your country?
- appreciate other ways of doing things?
- immerse yourself in a different culture?
- gain a fresh understanding of yourself and others?
- learn new ways to communicate?
- form international friendships?

Then you're ready for Rotary Youth Exchange.

This year, more than 7,000 young people are having the opportunity of a lifetime – a chance to live in another country and seeing the world from a new perspective through Rotary Youth Exchange.

The application deadline for Quesnel outbound students is Nov. 7. For information, call Sheila Pritchard, 250-992-6824 or visit [www.d5040youthexchange.ca](http://www.d5040youthexchange.ca).

Rotary exchange student experiences the Cariboo

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