My exchange year was full of wonderful trips and amazing people. I am so glad that I decided to do this because if I didn’t then I wouldn’t have had all these experiences.

I learned patience and acceptance and I have grown as a person because of this. The exchange year was full of ups and downs but nothing is perfect and that’s the best thing. As you go through the hard times you realize how the smaller things shouldn’t matter as much and you’ll also realize that not everything in life is going to be perfect. I met one of my best friends on this exchange year as well! Her name is Jasmin and she’s the best. We were always seen together and hanging out. I also got to make friends from around the world! This is just the beginning for me and this trip was just the start of something big in my life.

I chose Finland for the great education but it’s so much more than that. Finland has insane weather. It snowed in May! Finland is full of forests and the people here love it. I remember the first day I landed there and the air was so fresh! I couldn’t believe how clean it was! I have to thank Veikko Tervo and Anni-Leena Myllyla-Tervo for accepting me into their home and becoming a part of their family. They have two small children, Sela and Sulvei. I have grown to love them all and I will miss them so much! They have become like a second family to me. I recommended that people do an exchange year in Finland or at least, visit because there is so much to see and do there. Whether it is visiting the Santa Claus Village in Lapland or eating Fazer chocolate especially Susu Pala (My favorite)! If I had to give any advice to a future exchange student it would be, don’t focus on the small things. Every moment counts and make the most of the time you have.

This year has changed me a lot, becoming the person I am today. I got back to where I grew up and where I fun of my accent. It is time to leave and no more people making my accent. No more speaking my second language and no more spontaneous trips, no more sleepovers with my new best friends, The ones who have shown me cultures and religions and parts of the world I’ve never seen before. The friends and family who helped me find myself.

In a few days, I will go back home and see the familiar roads and buildings and it will seem only like yesterday. I will see the people I had to fight the tears with and give hugs and goodbyes to a year ago. I will slowly go back to the life I used to love. I will soon start to realize how many things have changed; how much I have changed. A few days from now, I will leave. I will take down the pictures and pack my clothes. I will see the town one last time before I get on the flight back to my home country. No more spontaneous trips, no more sleepovers with my new best friends. The ones who have shown me love and family. They have become like a second family to me. I recommend that people much! They have become like a second family to me. I recommend that people do an exchange year in Finland or at least, visit because there is so much to see and do there. Whether it is visiting the Santa Claus Village in Lapland or eating Fazer chocolate especially Susu Pala (My favorite)! If I had to give any advice to a future exchange student it would be, don’t focus on the small things. Every moment counts and make the most of the time you have.

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My exchange year was absolutely amazing. I had so much fun and I would like to share the happy times in America. First of all, I was really blessed with my host family. I cannot explain how amazing they are nor imagine my exchange year without them. Long story short, they always took care of me, talked to me a lot, even when my English was not as good, took me to many places such as Florida, Pennsylvania and historical places because I told them I love history. They taught me about Christianity and was curious about my Japanese culture and family. Literally, they are just amazing people.

Secondly, I am also blessed with my Area Representative. She is the greatest person I’ve ever met, and she eventually became my third mom. I want to say I love and appreciate her very much.

Finally, I am really thankful for Church. I was able to make good friends who know about Christ, they have their opinions, and they ask and listen to my story. Going to Church every Sunday was one of my favorite parts. Everyone was kind, calm and nice. Every Sunday morning and night, we had youth group. That was really cool because everyone talked about everything that was mostly new to me. And we played volleyball, basketball or other fun games. It was fun and helped us get to know each other.

I also learned that there are many kinds of different people in America. That is absolutely amazing. It’s hard to find differences between people who come from different places back in my home country, because our culture does not encourage us having different opinions, different looks or just be different. I still have stories I really want to share that are about school, friends, teachers, and events, but I am going to stop here. These stories are just a little part of my exchange year experience.

Thank you to ASSE organization, for giving me such a great opportunity to experience the American high school. Of course, I am really thankful to my family and friends. Thank you for reading!

A big “Thank You” to the Campbell family for everything you did for Shu and for offering her an amazing exchange experience. Huge thanks to ASSE Area Representative Terry Cross as well, for helping make such connections happen!

---Continued from front page

I have to do whatever it took and then my coach let me run team race relays. I ran a 4 by 4 and I got first place! I ran the 4 by 8 and came in second place. Everybody was congratulating me and I did not understand what was going on because I could not believe that I did it. I got gold and silver medals. I took them and realized that everything is possible. It is just hard work and the right attitude. I would advise the future FLEX students to talk about their problems and try to solve them. Never stay alone with your own thoughts because you never know how high you can fly until you get out of your comfort zone.

Thank you to the Schafer family in Annapolis, Nebraska for hosting Aisha this past school year, her Area Representative Marcia Foley and Area Coordinator Heather Chronicles for giving Aisha some great advice.
Beautiful girls and beautiful mums all around! It’s a well-known dish from where I live and they was okay. School is going good so far, I am trying Music. Everyone is nice at school and makes me feel included. My host family is amazing! My host sister and I are so alike it’s crazy and we get along so well. Artiom has prepared some delicious dishes and I made eggplant salad. It was a good experience!“ exclaims ASSE Outbound Exchange Student Jasmine from Minnesota enjoying her exchange year in Australia.

My host family makes me feel like I’m truly part of their family. I made them some tater tot hot dish. It’s a well-known dish from where I live and they liked the meal. I am so excited for the rest of the experience!” exclaims ASSE Outbound Exchange Student Jasmine from Minnesota enjoying her exchange year in Australia.

Since I came to the US, my life completely changed. I started trying new things, eating differently, and seeing many new places. A lot of people are influencing my stay in so many positive ways. My host family is making so much effort to make me feel happy and like home and the new friends with whom I am starting to share memories are amazing!”

What a lovely experience! Huge thanks to the Chico family in Groove De, Michigan for everything you do to make Maricen’s year an amazing one and to Area Representative Heather Ross for helping make this happen!

“I am loving Australia so far. I went to the Sydney Harbor Bridge, went swimming in the ocean, and saw Sydney. I tried Vegemite and it changed. I started trying new things, eating differently, and seeing many new places. A lot of people are influencing my stay in so many positive ways. My host family is making so much effort to make me feel happy and like home and the new friends with whom I am starting to share memories are amazing!”

Music. Everyone is nice at school and makes me feel included. My host family is amazing! My host sister and I are so alike it’s crazy and we get along so well. Artiom has prepared some delicious dishes and I made eggplant salad. It was a good experience!“ exclaims ASSE Outbound Exchange Student Jasmine from Minnesota enjoying her exchange year in Australia.

World Heritage exchange student Valentyn from Ukraine is the kicker/punter for the St. Variity Football team for Paradise High School. He has earned a game ball for each game his team has won and the season isn’t over yet. Way to go Valentyn!

Thank you to the Cardwell family in Paradise, California and Area Representative, Peg Fair for making moments like this possible.

We always say it’s not goodbye, but see you later, when it comes to a strong bond between our students and their host families. Same goes for the Thayer family who are reunited again with their 2017-18 ASSE Exchange Student Andrea. This time it is in Andrea’s home country of Italy.

A big thank you to Curtis and Josie Thayer from Anchorage, Alaska for welcoming Andrea with open arms into their home and family and for making his exchange dream come true! Thank you to ASSE Area Representative Crystal Nygard for helping make such connections happen!

World Heritage FLEX Scholarship student Oryna from Ukraine is loving her time in Ohio! Enjoying everything from homecoming dress shopping with her host sister exchange student Elizav from Taiwan (BFI), to delicious fair food and even cheering on her high school football team! Thank you to the Sharp family of Zanesville, Ohio for giving the girls this amazing opportunity of being in America and to Nexus Chapman, World Heritage Representative for helping make this happen.

World Heritage FLEX Scholarship student Elma from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Anya from Bulgaria, Tamara from Armenia, Joly from Egypt, Zarema from Kyrgyzstan and Area Representative Kimberly Ann Kelch volunteered at the Sahibi to the Arts.

We thank everyone involved in helping make all those girls' dreams of exchange become reality!
My Advice for Future Students

By 2018-19 ASSE Outbound Exchange Student
Kama from Kiowa, Colorado who enjoyed her exchange year in Spain

I decided about two years ago that I was going to go to Spain my junior year of high school. Although it was scary and I had doubts I am so grateful I had the opportunity to come to Spain. I wouldn’t trade it for anything. I remember first leaving the United States and thinking 10 months, that’s forever! Now looking back, I say to myself, that was fast. Though my exchange was amazing, I did have a rough patch when I had to change host families. This was a hard part in my exchange but honestly it was for the better and I look at it as a two exchanges.

The first part of my exchange with my first family was absolutely amazing. I lived in a small town called Malpartida de Cáceres. I traveled across Europe and saw so many incredible places with this family. The family that I was with spoke four languages so by being around these languages and going to the countries I learned not only Spanish but I began to learn Portuguese and French unexpectedly. During this time, I found the most incredible friends an American could ever ask for. They are absolutely amazing and would always help me if I messed up on a word or didn’t quite understand something. They were also the ones by my side while I was switching families. Although it was hard to change it was nice to have a good support around me when I would go to a school.

The second part of my exchange I was with another incredible family in the heart of Cáceres. This family only spoke Spanish so it allowed me to get extremely good at Spanish (which is the main reason I came). I wasn’t traveling as much so it made me even more close with my friends at school than I was originally. Both families had their pros but each family was perfect in their own way.

I met some of the most welcoming and kind people in Spain and I loved the countries I visited. Although I was with different families, I met some of the most incredible friends and learned not only Spanish but I began to learn Portuguese and French unexpectedly. During this time, I found the most incredible friends an American could ever ask for. They are absolutely amazing and would always help me if I messed up on a word or didn’t quite understand something. They were also the ones by my side while I was switching families. Although it was hard to change it was nice to have a good support around me when I would go to a school.

My advice for future exchange students:

1. Bloom where you are planted. This is a quote I revived from a student in my language class. I love this quote because it describes exactly how I felt the first few months of my exchange year. I was so scared at the beginning and wasn’t sure if I was going to be able to keep up with the class. I am so glad I decided to stay and try worth it. I learned a new way of thinking just by the way words in Spanish were being spoken. It brought a whole new way of looking at the world to my sight. At the end of the day, you realize that people are the same, and we all have the same problems just with a different language. I was so sad that I had to say goodbye to all the people I loved so dearly but I know it isn’t goodbye forever.

2. You have to learn the language before you are perfect at it. Instead of jumping right in at school, ask your teachers if you are allowed to study the language during class the first couple of weeks. I did this and it is honestly the best thing that I could have done. I would go to class every day and bring a notebook and a Spanish book and study. It was better for me the first four weeks to study Spanish while at school than to waste my time looking at what the teachers were writing on the board and have no idea what was going on. After about four weeks I could understand pretty much everything that was going on and could ask questions.

3. Be patient. You aren’t going to be perfect at the language instantly. You are actually going to be HORRIBLE (if you haven’t studied it for many years). Just keep going and try to speak to anyone and everyone about anything and everything.

4. Have fun! You have a year to have the most fun that you have ever had and to experience something that only a handful of teens will ever get to experience so make the most of it.

Joseph,

ASSE Spanish Scholarship exchange student (FAO Spain) has started his exchange year with much enthusiasm and community pride. He lives with the Yulast family in Dewitt, Michigan. He adores his little host sister and spends many hours playing with her and attempting to calm her when she is upset. He enjoys a helping hand at home with anything he is asked to do and is often asking what he can do to help his host family. He fits in perfectly with his host family and he has really made a difference in his community and family life. He is eager to help out at home with chores and help his host siblings. His host mom had surgery on her ankle and Jose is first out the door and grabbing the groceries as soon as she pulls up into the drive.

I have assisted his host brother Jordan, who has high-functioning autism, with curbing inappropriate behavior and boosting good behavior. He also aids curbing Jordan’s ticks, which is improving Jordan’s self-esteem. This in turn makes Jordan want to be more social at home, school, and community. Jose has been able to distract Jordan in the awkward moments at school and Jordan is finally making friends at his school. Jose is even waiting to volunteer at the local Humane Society until after Jordan turns 16 in March, so they can do it together.

At school, Jose has been elevated from his 11th grade seminar into 12th grade and performs well above his grade level. He is even attending an AP class. He has volunteered to tutor students during seminar with their Spanish speaking and French unexpectedly. During this time, I found the most incredible friends an American could ever ask for. They are absolutely amazing and would always help me if I messed up on a word or didn’t quite understand something. They were also the ones by my side while I was switching families. Although it was hard to change it was nice to have a good support around me when I would go to a school.

Making New Friends

By 2019-20 ASSE YES Scholarship Student Debbie from Ghana
enjoying her exchange year in Wake Forest, North Carolina

Jose, ASSE Spanish Scholarship exchange student (FAO Spain) has started his exchange year with much enthusiasm and community pride. He lives with the Yulast family in Dewitt, Michigan. He adores his little host sister and spends many hours playing with her and attempting to calm her when she is upset. He enjoys a helping hand at home with anything he is asked to do and is often asking what he can do to help his host family. He fits in perfectly with his host family and he has really made a difference in his community and family life. He is eager to help out at home with chores and help his host siblings. His host mom had surgery on her ankle and Jose is first out the door and grabbing the groceries as soon as she pulls up into the drive.

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Jumping into His Exchange Year

By 2019-20 ASSE Area Representative Stephanie Hein and
ASSE Area Coordinator Teresa Weyer

In the exchange community, he is participating in a group chat with several students in other states. He is collaborating to mentor the other students to communicate problems with their host families and to their Area Representatives instead of giving up and returning home. He is trying to remind them of the reason they wanted to come to America and study, and he is encouraging them to continue trying.

As you can see, Jose is not sitting idle at home. He has jumped into his exchange year with much enthusiasm.

ASSE YES Scholarship student Debbie from Ghana has spent some time volunteering with horses recently and she looks like a natural!

Debbie says, “Volunteering with Planet Peace has been such an amazing experience. I never thought I would enjoy spending time with horses. I heard of this wonderful opportunity from my exchange student friend. She told me about the volunteer work around horses and even getting the opportunity to learn how to ride. I was really excited since I’ve always dreamt of working with horses and riding a horse. Being at the farm, I got to learn how
to make horse food, brush horses, clean the stables and even learn how to ride. I have been there several times and it’s been amazing and am learning so much. I felt scared the first time I met the horses, since it was my first time being with a horse. I tried going near them and to my surprise they were the best. I plan on doing most of my volunteering hours with Planet Peace since I enjoy being with the horses.” Planet Peace is a non-profit dedicated to helping youth become active peacemakers.

A Big Thank You to the Selna family and ASSE Area Representative Coralee Rogers for helping Debbie realize her dream.