



Horizons: Returning Home and Continuing Your Exchange Experience

Returning home, after living abroad with a host family, a former YFU exchange student wrote:

"When I left my host country, I thought that was the end of my exchange experience. Now, when I look back, I see that it was only the beginning."

This is the thought of many returning exchange students when they see the potential of their future as affected by their YFU experience.

What new values, interests, and skills are you bringing home with you and how will you apply them to the next few years of your life? It is up to you as a YFU returnee to apply what you've learned, but you will have to take initiative! If you're not careful, you could lose touch with the interests and skills you've learned through your exchange experience and let them disappear. Here are some suggestions on how to use them in positive ways in the years to come. They are ways to help you keep your exchange experience alive.

Identify and Analyze Your New Interests and Skills

Many YFU exchange students realize the quantity and depth of new interests, skills and abilities they developed abroad only after they return home. It is the comparison of oneself to classmates, friends, brothers and sisters that often shows that an exchange student has changed as a result of living in another country. What are some changes you might look for?

Personal growth is often reflected in self-reliance, new independence, patience, and the ability to solve problems and make judgments. Growth also includes deeper interests in people, cultures, and international events.

Understanding how to learn may be shown through openness and insight, being realistic, setting priorities, and using specific experiences to generalize new knowledge.

New knowledge might include new awareness and understanding about different cultures, their respective values, ideas, and attitudes and how they interrelate. Understanding similarities between people, not just the differences, is an important awareness. The language and communication skills required to live in another culture are valuable skills.

Deep personal relationships with people from different countries often go far beyond superficial friendship. Love, trust, respect, and empathy are all part of new commitments to people that exchange students have grown to know.

Which of the skills are ones you feel you have gained? Can you identify others? Which of these are new interests you have developed? What interests have resulted from your exchange experience? The more specifically you can identify interests and skills you now have, the more easily you'll be able to find ways to use and build on them.

Apply Your New Interests and Skills

There are countless ways to use the interests and skills you have gained as an exchange student. YFU encourages you to be creative in applying what you have learned. Here are nine suggestions you can begin to explore.

Work with other internationals. Be a host brother or sister, a big brother or sister, a counselor, or simply a friend to international students in your community. Join an international club and spend time with people who have shared similar experiences.

Continue language learning. Build on the foreign language you used abroad during your exchange by taking additional language classes. Exchange tutoring in your native tongue with someone who speaks your second language. If your second language is really good, take a language proficiency exam (if available) to get academic credit or advanced placement in secondary school or college.

Learn more about your host country. Use your firsthand knowledge of another country as a basis for taking related courses in school, like geography, history, or international relations. Build on your knowledge by reading newspapers and books, viewing films, and basing school research projects and papers on your host culture. Follow the news by reading online newspapers from your host country (dir.yahoo.com/News_and_Media/Newspapers/By_Region/Countries). Use additional information gained in these ways to make presentations about your YFU experience more interesting.

Let your exchange experience influence educational choices. Choose secondary school or university courses related to your host country, your interest in international relations and other cultures. Make decisions on which university to attend based on course offerings in the areas in which you are interested.

Let your exchange experience influence career choices. Investigate the wide variety of careers that can incorporate the knowledge, skills, and interests from your foreign living experience. Select from careers in international business or law; your country's diplomatic or foreign service; international development agencies, overseas teaching, travel agencies, and volunteer groups. Remember that there are many occupations at home and abroad that need bilingual employees.

Volunteer to help in schools. Make yourself available as a resource person or discussion leader in social studies and language classes in primary and secondary schools. Look for chances to help with international days, intercultural workshops, and international fairs. Check with counselors and coordinators of international student programs to see what you can do. Seek ways to become a member of special committees dealing with international education or exchange programs.

Volunteer to work in your community. Help organizations that support youth exchanges, community service and development. Look for groups working with immigrants, refugees, or the aged, that can use your skills of listening, patience, and empathy.

Keep in touch with your exchange experience. Write to your family and friends in your host country. Keep up-to-date by sending photos. Use email and instant messenger to stay connected. Read a host country newspaper online: (multilingualbooks.com/online-newspapers.html). Plan a return visit to your host country, encourage your natural family to visit, or invite your host family to come to your country.

Continue Your Interest with YFU

Returnees stay involved-with YFU in many ways all over the world. In a number of national and regional YFU organizations, many workers are former exchange students! Here are some ideas for you:

Join the returnee organization. Contact your nearest YFU office to see how to join the returnee alumni organization. If there isn't one, see if there would be a way for you to help start one.

Recruit students and host families. Help your YFU office by giving presentations to school groups and clubs, to encourage students to go on the program, and families to host students.

Help orient students and host families. Volunteer to help YFU with orientation programs for students from your country going abroad, incoming international students, and families who will host students.

Volunteer your time in a YFU office. Call your YFU office and offer to help with small jobs that arise: mailings, telephoning, and other routine work. Every YFU office depends upon volunteers!

How to Get Started

Where should you begin? When? The when is **NOW** before you forget or get involved in other activities. Here are suggestions you can do today:

1. Address and stamp at least two envelopes to your host family and special friends in your host country. Keep them where you can see them so you write at least twice a year!
2. Call your YFU office to see what you can do to help.
3. Compile all your exchange experience material in one place, such as in a scrapbook or notebook, chronologically if possible, so you can find what you need. Make a section for keeping photos and letters you'll be receiving from host family and friends.
4. Write a letter to your high school in your host country explaining what the exchange experience meant to you. Address it to the principal or headmaster.
5. Write an article for your hometown newspaper on your YFU experience, including specific examples of new things you did and what you learned.
6. Prepare a 20-minute presentation about your YFU experience. Include ways to use your photos, clothing and other items brought from your host country. Have this presentation ready so you can share it at any time with family, friends, your school or community groups.

Once these are done, you're ready to reread this newsletter to see where else you will apply the skills and interests that your YFU exchange experience gave you.

Good luck and stay involved!