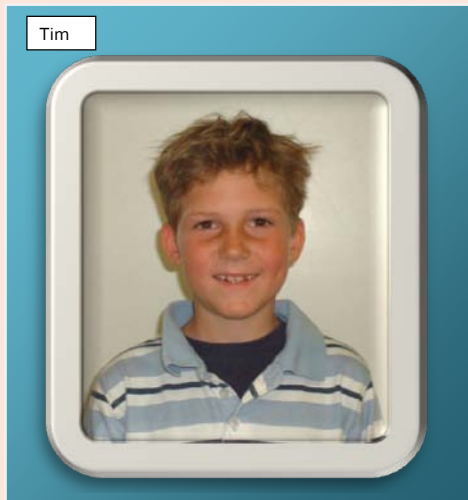
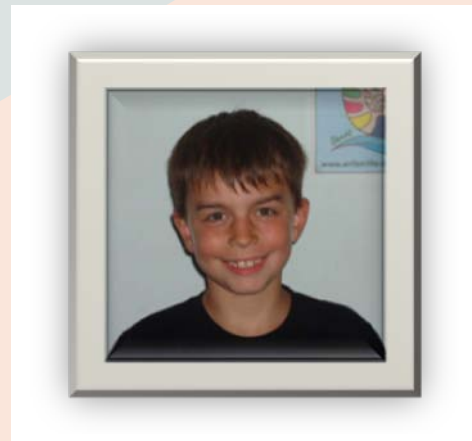


Firsthand experience



Jack



Jack Newell (from Cheshire) went to Germany in February 2006. He was just nine. Timm, his German brother, is a lovely boy who lives near Stuttgart. Thank you Jack for your kind letter.

Firstly, I would like to say a huge thank you for allowing me to do the exchange because it has been a fantastic experience. I have been home for nearly 2 months now and still really miss Timm and the rest of my OTHER family! I have learned a lot of German, and a lot about German culture. Also, I learned a lot about snowboarding!!!

It is true that I did feel very home sick when I left my English family, but after talks with Sophie (mum) and Katherine (Enfamille), I was soon very happy. I really think that I will see Timm a lot more in the future because he is now my brother !!!

The family I stayed with was amazing. Sophie was a very caring mother and Michael fixed my teeth, my head, and much more (he is a dentist and doctor and everything else!). They are really like my 2nd family. I also love my new brother and sister Julio and Minou. And I can't forget my new pet Moritz (the rabbit).

I made loads of friends in Germany and they are all fantastic and I would like to go back next year to see them again.

Timm is coming to stay for a week this month and will see his friends and family when he is here. Everyone is looking forward to him coming.

Thanks again Enfamille !!!!!!!

Jack



Here is an email that a new En Famille girl sent to Cate, an old En Famille girl. Tara lives in England and Cate in California.

Dear Cate,

My name is Tara and I am planning on doing an exchange with En Famille. I am writing to say thank you for sending Jacques your letter about your time in France and it helped me realize a lot about why I should and shouldn't do certain things and why the letters between my parents and me need to be so few. I also have a few questions.

Did you eventually get used to life in France?

Did you ever try another exchange?

Did you still learn a lot of French?

Thank you for reading this and I hope you will reply soon.

from Tara

And here is Cate's answer :

Hi Tara.

Yes, I did eventually get used to life in France, so much so that I now have two other families with whom I have stayed and visited and I go back almost every summer. I'm not going to say it was easy.

Although France is a first-world country, and many would expect two urban and developed cultures to be alike, I felt like France could not possibly be more different than what I had grown up with. The culture takes some getting used to, and I think it was especially hard for me because I was not very open-minded. I was not prepared for change, and therefore made it even harder for myself to adjust. Therefore, the best advice I can give you is to be ready for change, embrace it, and prepare yourself for the difficulties of being away from your home and your family, friends, and language. Just think of how awesome it will be when you get home speaking another language like a native, and having done something that very few kids are capable of doing. As long as you know that it won't be easy, that in itself will make it easier, and France (I assume that's where you'll go) is an amazing country and you will very quickly learn to love it and get attached to it like a second home, a home very far away from home. That exchange was that hardest thing I've ever done, by far. And the best part is, I wouldn't change a second of it!

I didn't try another exchange, and here's a little story behind that: It took me a year to convince my parents to let me go- I wanted to learn French so badly, and I was always extremely independent- and I finally did by telling my mother, "Mom, if you love me enough, you'll let me go." (That was the line she always used on me when I would try to lock the cat up with me and force her to like me). So she did let me go, because she loves me enough. However, upon my return, she told me right away, "Cate, I don't love you enough to let you go again, so don't even try it." So I didn't. However, I would love to learn another language, because now I cannot get enough of new languages and cultures and countries, all thanks to En Famille, so I plan on studying a year in Italy in two years to learn Italian.

As soon as I got home, I had to be tested in order to be placed in French at my new school, and I had never before had any foreign language instruction whatsoever. So the French teacher there walked in and started speaking with me in French. After a few minutes, in her excitement that an American 7th grader knew French so fluently, exclaimed that I belong in AP French. Then she gave me paper and a pen and told me to write something- anything. Well, I tried, but I didn't do well enough, apparently, because my AP French diagnosis quickly dropped to French 2. I was still a little ahead of the game, though, but not so much that I couldn't properly learn my grammar and writing and reading (because you will find that you will learn this language completely fluently orally and speak it like a native- to the point where other natives don't hear an accent at all). So I went through five years of French instruction, taking every possible class I could take (until I ran out of options) and I am now almost as fluent on paper as I am orally.

When I visited some of my French friends this summer, they were impressed with my writing skills as well as my oral skills when they jokingly tested me. So, anyway, you will learn more than you're prepared to learn, not just in the form of a language, but also in the form of a culture, and a new understanding of international relations and how languages work, much more than any school instruction alone can give you. However, you must keep it up in school upon your return and speak it with whomever you can to avoid losing it, which will inevitably happen every so slightly. I did continue learning more French, but I could never be where I am today with my French were it not for En Famille, which prepared me for all the school instruction that followed. And now I am entering college as a French minor and the intentions to study abroad and graduate knowing at least a third language. Now, I cannot get enough of language and anything international and everything I've learned that En Famille has brought me. I owe it all to that little nine-year old I vaguely remember who wouldn't take no for an answer. Don't take no for an answer, Tara, and have an awesome time.

Best of Luck

Cate Sullivan
cate.sullivan@cox.net



Here is a short essay by Marie Chandavoine, a French girl, written in France the day she returned from her six months in England. (August 1980). She had no help and knew no English before her trip to England.

MY SIX MONTHS IN ENGLAND

"The first time, I knew about the exchange with my friend Céline Brochet, who went in England for six months already. I was instresting about that. Mr. Pinault talked with my parents. My mother wass worried about me because she didn't know if the family was nice or not. Then, my father thought it will be a good idea. It's clair I am going to England. I will going the 9th of March. I prepared my suitcases and bags. I went with my parents to Mr. Pinault's house, and I went with Sandra Courreau. Her parents went to the Havre, we saw the big boat was at 23h. When I was on the boat, I tried to sleep, but could not because you had to sleep on a chair. When I left the boat Mr Blackwell took Sandra in her house first, and I stayed for about 2 or 3 hours in Mrs Blackwell's house. After, they took me in Paignton. Mrs Harris was very nice and Tracey as well. After we went to the bank to change the French money I had. When I went in school at 9H05, we had every morning a big assembly with the all school. Tracey have a brother called Christopher and a bitch called Goldie. The house is on elevation. When the sun was shining we went down the beach. We went at some partys. The last day I was in England I prepered my suitcases and bags. I went to the boat at weymouth with Mrs Harris and Tracey. Four went into the boat, Hélène and Mr and Mrs Brochet. I am happy to see my family."

Marie





A letter from Marie Gay, she was 10 at the time (July 2002). Her spoken English was very good at the end of her stay.

I am having a great time in England! (except from school). At school, I find it extremely easy (even if I'm doing well).

In 3 months, I found out that English children do much more work than French.

(As well, I found out that even if they work more than French people, they aren't cleverer).

Anyway, the family is very kind and the food really nice. I'm finding the last month quite hard because I am thinking that I have been here long enough (5 months) and that I want to go back to see my friends and family. (Even if I know that I won't forget my special English sister).

Marie Gay-Wood (Beauvais/France)



Thoughts from a caring mother. Michael left for France in September 2000.

Teen Exchange by Ros Bleach.

If you thought your 13-year-old was too old to go abroad, think again !

Our 12 year old son, Michael, was so certain that 6 months in France would expand his life that it was he that insisted we stay in the scheme even though no match had been found as he was approaching his 13th birthday. It was he that persuaded us to motor all the way down to the En Famille get together in Hatfield. On the application form Michael had answered the question: 'Do you like to please your parents?' with a bold 'NO!'. The upshot of his meeting with Jacques was that Jacques, having discovered that Michael was not a delinquent in the making after all but just a boy who knew his own mind, suddenly hit upon the ideal family for him. Jacques' intuition was very good. The family he chose was just right.

It took some diplomacy to convince Michael's school that to lose a pupil to France at the beginning of a SATS year, and to gain a French boy (all be it temporarily) when they were already over-subscribed, would enhance the school in the long run. Happily someone on the management team had the vision to agree to the exchange

And so, 2 ½ months later, having just turned 13, Michael set off on his first great adventure.

Being without him was not as hard as we had feared. It was quite a surprise to find that we weren't waking up every morning wishing his bed was not empty. There were several reasons for this. The most important was that we knew Michael was doing something that he felt was absolutely right for him (however hard). The second was that we had managed to squeeze in a visit to his French family in Biarritz before the 6 months stint began. This meant that whenever we thought of Michael we could 'see' him right there amongst his new family, surrounded by a set of warm, lively people. When he talked about the wicked 3-year-old or the kindly granny we knew just what he meant. Lastly, Michael's absence was offset by the valuable extra time we were spending with his twin brother and older sister.

Michael's French took a long time to 'take' and at times that made life hard for him. No doubt his greater age made the acquisition more arduous. But gradually we could hear a French twang creeping into his English on the phone. By his return he had to concentrate hard to switch back into his mother tongue. Meeting Michael at the airport was thrilling. However much we thought we hadn't missed him seeing him again was overwhelming.

The next half of our year was spent living with 4 teenagers in the house. Yan, our new French son, had all the warmth and good humour of the rest of his family. He wasn't quiet! But I don't suppose three 13 year olds together would ever make for a quiet life. Being in his teens made Yan perhaps less ready to adapt to our ways. But then we all enjoyed learning from the distinct beliefs and enthusiasms that he brought with him.

At the end of the year both Yan and Michael expressed the view, independently, that this had been one of the most important experiences of their lives. Both families noted how much they had matured and how relationships with their siblings had improved as a result. Neither had learned to speak their new language like a native but both could converse freely and read entire books in it for fun. Michael's SATS turned out fine (What do they learn in year 9?) As a bonus he is taking his French GCSE a year early without extra school tuition. He is preparing for it in the best possible way at this very moment: With Yan in Biarritz !

So ... If you have a teenager who wants to join En Famille GO FOR IT !

Rosalind Bleach (Wolvercote/Grande-Bretagne)



Matthew Dover left in February 1998 and his brother Andrew in March 2000.
Lesley wrote this letter a year later. Thank you Lesley.

Dear Jacques,

Thank you to you and En Famille for the great experience you have given my sons. This is a very insular area but I am the proud mother of two Europeans. God knows in this world we need something that can draw people together. Both Mats and Andrew are doing very well with their French and the exchange broadened their minds and gave them confidence. If you ever need someone to talk to new families please let me know and I will help if I can.

Best wishes to you and all in En Famille,

Lesley Dover (Saltfleetby/Grande-Bretagne)



Stephen sent me this letter two weeks after his arrival. He was 11. His French is now excellent. His brother and sister had already each done an exchange !
Thank you Stephen for what you think of our National soccer team !

Dear Jacques, 14/09/2002

Life with my new family is excellent. They live in a wonderful place beside forests and mountains. At the moment I am in their country house which is in the mountains. I have learnt a lot of French since I came here two weeks ago. I love the French food, especially tartine (bread jam and butter). The school here is much better than my Irish school in Galway. The kids here are very proud of France even though they did so bad in the world cup (coupe du monde). The family are great fun. The little girl (Agathe) aged 2 wakes up everyone early in the morning shouting out for her maman to come and take her out of bed. The dog (Lutsy) has a problem with his throat but is still fun to play with. The cat (césar) loves to get attention and is very easy going. My exchange student (Pierre) is very fun. We are getting on very well together. He has introduced me to all his friends at school. They are very kind. We should be going up a mountain soon. So I should finish up this letter."

Stephen Palcic (Galway/Irlande)

A letter from Benjamin who lives near Besançon, eastern France. Ben was only 9 at the time and nobody helped him.

He had a slow start with his written English but it was super at the end of his stay.

The second part is from George, his American brother. George will be in France from Feb 2003 for 6 months. George is 10.

Thursday 5 december 2002

in english/ en anglais

Dear Jacques,

The exange going very good, I play more with George. At the scool I have a lot friends, at the scool, like me, Mathias, Alex, Bryce and, a little Isaac, don't like me (the three big boys are not good.) I have learn a lot things, at the scool, and I can understand everythings did I learn! It's real, I have some things I have to learn for by perfect in french, but It's my third month in France and, I think I have learn a lot for my third month. I can't write and take on french so fast! Thanks for giving me a very good family.

THANKS,

Ben Wheeler, Being an Exchange Brother

I am an only child and since Ben has been here for a few months I have learned to be a better brother. I think it's nice to have a kid my age to play with instead of just parents or inviting a friend over. I'm also learning the short comings of having a brother ! When Ben first came he could say a couple of memorized sentences and words. Now he can put together sentences of his own. I haven't learned much about France yet, but I'm sure that I will when I go to France in February.

George Wheeler

George
Wheeler





Obviously Laure, from Brittany (north-west France) had a lovely time in California. She left in February 2002. She was 11. Here is her letter. You will notice at the end that "the grass is always greener on the other side".

Hello ! My name is Laure and I'm twelve . I'm back from San Luis Obispo, California. Before the exchange, I was sure I wouldn't go because at the meeting with Jacque, I was always answering his questions by: "it depends, It depends, and I don't know : it depends!!!!!" And even in California I was always saying that: "Laure, What do you want to eat? -I don't know !" "Are your sisters nice? - It depends!!!!!" At school, every body was nice to me .The first day, everyone was asking me so many questions but I wasn't able to understand it. Everywhere, especially at school, they were calling me LOWE LOWE I didn't like LOWE. Becky, my exchange sister, had two little sisters: Eleanor (two and a half) and Charlotte (five) and one brother: William (nine). Sometimes, on Saturday morning, I was sleeping when suddenly I heard: "Wake up Lowe wake up!" It was Eleanor that was jumping on my bed and screaming "Lowe wake up!" " - Eleanor I want to sleep !" In America the school is so cool but really different. I liked drama, design, and computer lab.

But the stuff I liked the best at school was the special days like the Crazy hair day, St Valentine's day ! The school was just so cool .I will stop here with the school, because if I still talk about it, it will take at least one all page because the school is just so cool. We went on a trip to San Francisco, and Los Angeles .I saw the famous gold bridge, and so many things. In Los Angeles we slept in a really big hotel, and there was a swimming pool and an exercise's room, I was really surprise to see it. We did so many things ! The first month, I was saying to myself: "It will be so long !" But the last month I was saying: "It's so short ! ! !" The first month it's really really really hard. Personally, I think the association is a very good idea , my experience was so cool, but everytime I asked my exchange sister to help me with my homework or to play a game with me the answer was no, I have to do something else !

But my family was so so so great ! They were so nice to me ! If I can choose between my American family and my own family it's sure it's my American family !!!!!!!

Laure Colleu (Douarnenez/France)

Thank you Pierre for your kind letter. Marie, your little sister, had a fantastic time in Germany. Her German family wanted to keep her !
In the En Famille circle, large families are not unusual.

Thirteen years later

My elder sister did an exchange in England as did my elder brother. So I went without thinking about it that much. I hardly knew how to say "hello", "yes" or "no". And many years after I still find some words faster in English than in French!!! This exchange is something good.

This year is my final year of studies. I have never been through one them without being told what an excellent asset it was to know English fluently. Whether for the international exams (TOEIC ...) or for work experiences (I wish to do my next one in Ireland), this exchange is something good.

To sum up all these ideas, we can say that this exchange gives three major advantages :

- We meet new friends (bonds of friendship last often quite a long time with the foreign family).*
- It's a school subject less to work for. More seriously, it's an easier school subject to work for, and the other foreign languages are also easier to learn.*
- It makes an ENORMOUS impression on a CV. It is therefor easier to "sell" yourself during an interview for a school or for a job.*

So thanks to my parents who made this crazy bet starting with their first children. My younger sister (the number 6) is actually in Germany, and the last one will go too (well we would like her to), because this exchange is really something good.

*Pierre Bouchard with Richard Sandle in 1989,
Stratford-upon-Avon (Paimpol France)*

Pierre's little sisters
did an exchange too!



Guillemette flew to America in August 2001. She was 11. She is a country girl, California was quite an adventure for her ! She had a good American accent when she came back !

Hello !

My name is Guillemette, I am twelve. Last year I did an exchange with Catherine, my American sister. She lives in California in Santa Maria. My family was very nice and I have a lot friends over there. Also I liked school because you finish at 14h30. I think to do an exchange is a very good thing especially when you are a child. I really like my exchange : you learn a new language, you meet a lot of different people, you live in a new family and you see how they live, ... and much more !!! Thank you very much for my exchange.

Guillemette Méric (Bernos-Beauloc / France)

Thank you very much Rachel for your letter. You left in February 1996.

Yes Rachel, we still ask the children if they can sing in tune. OK, I won't tell you why...

I'm Rachel Curry,

I did an exchange almost 7 years ago when I was nine. I'm coming up to be 16 next week. It is amazing how much the exchange can do for you. Not only in languages but also it is brilliant to experience another culture and meet new people. The exchange has given to me so much which otherwise I may never have achieved. Last summer, I took my French GCSE, two years early, I achieved an "A" and was very pleased with the result. I will soon go on to study French at a-level and perhaps move on to a course in French law at university. I have also maintained contact with my French hosts and saw Anne-Laure my French sister only last month, she is hoping to come and visit for Christmas which would be super. The memories from my exchange will stay with me forever, people are always so amazed when I tell them I lived for 6 months in a foreign country at the age of nine. When I add the part about not seeing my parents for the full six months they are virtually speechless. At the time however it did not seem like such a big thing for me. I saw it is as an adventure, ever since I heard about it on holiday when I was seven ! I had been counting down the days until I was nine and could go for an interview. The thing I found strangest about the interview was some of the questions. I remember Jacques asking me one in particular about if I could sing in tune ? I still to this day have no idea what relevance the question had but it did keep me wondering for a while and I'm sure it had a purpose. Everyone in the organisation was so friendly and it was a joy when we met up both before and after the exchange. I would recommend anybody who is up for an adventure, likes to be independent and would like to see a new culture, meet new people and learn a new language to do an exchange. It has so many rewards and is most definitely worthwhile.

Thank you so much "EN FAMILLE"

Rachel CURRY (Grande-Bretagne / Bakewell)



Short note but rewarding, Eileen. Can you remember how hesitant you were before the exchange ?

I wonder why Cate decided to go to France, you are such a lovely mother !

Further down, we have a longer letter from Eileen.

Thank you En Famille. Our daughter Cate won a Certificat de Merite: 7th place in the county and 10th in the nation for a student with two or more years of studying French. 100,000 students participated at all levels. En Famille offers extraordinary results after a six month exchange!

Eileen Sullivan, San Diego



A letter from one of the luckiest girls in the world : 6 months in Australia at the age of 12 !

Hello !

My name's Aline (Aileen in English), I am French and I'm 12 years old.

I've been 6 months in Australia but now, I am back in " My " little Brittany with Grace, my Australian 's sister.

In Australia, I was in the south-Victoria (one of the 6 states of Australia), at Mildura. The weather was hot, I mean VERY hot ! The school was super, but really different : I had to wear a blue uniform, like everybody ... The students were very nice with me. During the holidays, I have been in Elcho Island, near Darwin (Northern territory) and we caught a little shark. I think it was the best part of my exchange !!! I believe that it's a great experience to go 6 months in an other country ; to have a new family, school, language ... Trust me !!!

GOOD LUCK to all of you !!!

Aline Dubois (Saint-Michel, France)

Anne-Cécile shed buckets of tears during the first few weeks of her two exchanges. She is now one of our best ambassadors. At the moment (March 2003) she is 16 and she is preparing to go to China next year ! Get your hankies ready Anne-Cécile !

AT SCHOOL IN IRELAND

I'll never forget the day when I went to school in Ireland. I wasn't able to speak any English but I was glad all the same. First, I met my teacher; her name was Orlaith. She was tidying the classroom when my penpal and I came in. At first, she didn't hear us but then she recognised my penfriend's voice because she already knew her. She wasn't like French teachers; she was wearing Jeans and a blue shirt. She was very cheerful. On the one hand she showed me the school and on the other hand she talked a bit with me in French. While we were chatting, the principal arrived. She was singing happily and she was so pleased to see me that she started talking to me in her language but I didn't understand anything. While we were driving back home, we told everybody about what happened at school. All the people were very nice with each other especially with me. They were always laughing and joking.

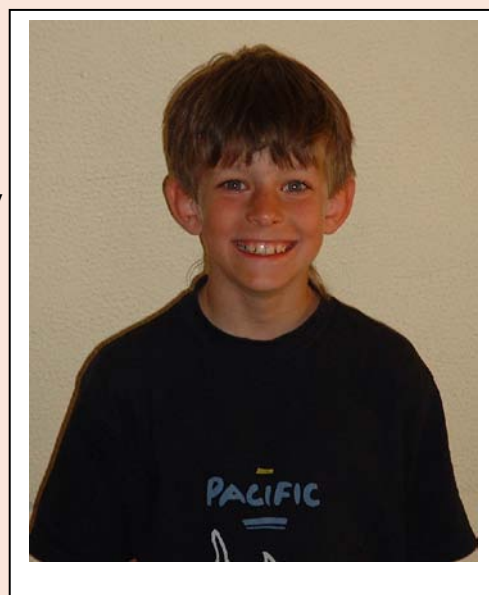
Anne-Cécile Gilbert (Trégastel-France)

Sorry Till, it is a hard life to have an extra sister for 6 months when you are only nine! I suppose your Dad translated this letter into English for us.

My name is Till Sereny, I am 9 years old and are living in Gehrden (Germany). My sister Ira is just doing an exchange with En Famille. For half a year I had a French sister. Two sisters are rather exhausting. Since one month they both are in France and now it is rather quiet at home. I miss both of them a little bit. Once a week we are talking with them on telephone. They seem to be fine, they even sent us some photos. I like to do one (or two?) exchange(s) too, first to Great Britain or Ireland and then to France. I often play football and tennis and hope for a family and a new brother, where I feel fine. In May we are having our German meeting and I will meet Margit and Jaques in Gießen.

Till Sereny (Gehrden –Allemagne)

Till Sereny



Thank you Carol and Bruce for this letter. You can now be very proud of your bilingual daughters : Emily and Blair.

I will never forget the first night I spent at your home : Emily was trapped in her bedroom because the door handle was broken ! Did you remember to change the bedroom door when you were renovating? You have a lovely house in Ojai, in the middle of an orange grove. I will come and see you again...

Carol, my wife, had a significant struggle deciding if she could let our children out of our control for 6 months. The experience that they would receive was uncompered but at the same time the mothering instincts said the only people who can lovingly care for our children is their parents. Jacques was instrumental in providing a realistic image of what the children would experience and how they would be cared for. The children wanted to go ahead and have a French girl come to our home. We fell in love with her and realized that a child that was so well brought up would have a family that would be good for our child. Both of our children went to France for the same 6 months. It was hard on us to be without our children for that time but even harder on our finances since we decided to renovate a portion of our home while they were gone. Then we decided to go to France for a vacation when it was time for the children to come home. We look back on the En Famille experience as one of lifes great opportunities and would recommend it to anyone who sees the value of opening the eyes of children to the world around them.

Emily wrote:

Going to France was a great experience that I recommend to others. My exchange family and I get along really well and I'm going to visit them this summer.

Blair wrote:

I was scared at first, to go to France, but when I got there I loved it. I didn't always agree with my exchange sister but, we had a great time and I made lots of friends.

Famille Johnston (Californie-USA)



Laura (from St Luis Obispo) now helps En Famille a great deal. And the two boys get on so well !

My French son Jean Dorcier arrived in September 1999 and stayed until the following February with my son Tad and me. I was very grateful that En Famille could find a family to match with us, as there are two households (my ex-husband's and mine) about a mile apart that both Jean and Tad had to go between. There were never any problems with Jean adjusting to American life. Within 3 weeks of his arrival he was being graded in the normal way as any native English speaking child would be. He happily joined in basketball, Pokemon cards, and all family activities. The boys bonded together as brothers, which was for both Tad and me a new experience as Tad is an only child. They would fight like little kittens, tumbling about on the floor, then snuggle up like baby rabbits in a nest to sleep together in the same bed!

When Tad returned with Jean to France he had a harder adjustment, but with the support of his experienced host family he was able to adjust and learn French. He now speaks pretty well (in present tense) although he never studied a word of French before he left. He fences and plays chess, which he did not before. This summer Jean and Tad will be together again. Jean arrives in June for a month and Tad and he return to France July 14 for another month together. We hope this is the first of a regular summer exchange for the two boys.

Laura Williams Rice (Californie-USA)



The Costello Family

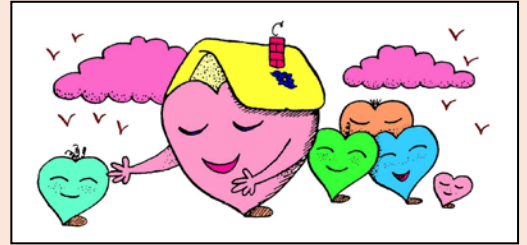
This is the email that Niamh's mother sent to Noémie's parents. That was in Feb 2001, just after the French parents had left their daughter Noémie in Ireland. But Noémie had already spent 6 months in Germany a year earlier !

Noemie was a little sad after you left but she was very brave. We went to the school and she had a little cry at the car but then she was brave again and went into the school. When I went to collect her she came out of the school with a big smile and said that it was "tres bien". The girls came home and had a snack. They did some homework- Noemie did maths on her own, she did not want help. Niamh needed a lot of help with her Irish! They went to swimming and Noemie liked it. She says she is happy to continue with the swimming. She is eating well and in good humour. A friend of Niamh's, Emma, called and the three girls had good fun together. Noemie seems to really want to learn English. She has already told Niamh to speak to her in English a little. I am very pleased with the first day. Enjoy the skiing. I will continue to let you know how Noemie is. La premiere Jour est fini et Noemie est tres bien. I hope your journey went well.

Best wishes, Paddy Costello (Dublin-Irlande).

MERCI "EN FAMILLE ", MERCI JACQUES

Famille COCHET (Hyères-France)



It is Eileen from San Diego again. She should be a writer.
You are incroyable, Eileen.

...an INCROYABLE exchange

In August 2000, my husband and I went to France to pick up our daughter at the end of her En Famille exchange. Her French family lives in Brittany, and it was an exquisite errand. We toured the lovely “granite rose” coastline, our two families feasted together on fresh crab legs and crepes, and we shopped a little in the tiny village which was swarming with tourists. After our good byes and a few tears, we headed off to Normandy to tour the D-Day historical sites and visit the American Cemetery on “Omaha Beach”. It was a trip that is never far from our hearts. To be reunited with our daughter, our personal 11-year-old French translator, while traveling through an emotional, historical journey was perhaps the grandest time we have ever experienced together as a family.

I am choosing to write about the end of our daughter’s year with En Famille because, had I known what that year would do for her personal growth, I think it would have been easier for us, for me in particular, during the six months without our daughter. We have only one child, so it was early to have an “empty nest;” but it was our daughter’s dearest wish to participate, and our only reason to say no was that we would miss her too much. Well, I’m glad she convinced us. Though she is our same sweet Cate, she is also a different child—more confident, independent, and responsible. And, needless to say, she speaks French! While in Normandy, we stayed with our friend’s French family—well, not exactly a blood relation, but Charles and Hubert La Valliant, while young boys during WWII, were busy rescuing paratroopers who had fallen behind German lines during the Allied invasion of France. One of the soldiers they rescued was Captain Andrew Hawkins, our friend’s father. Any friend of the Hawkins family is a friend of theirs, so to speak, so we were given royal treatment during our three-day stay at the family’s 400-year-old farmhouse. We feasted one evening at Charles’s home with both families, and the next night we feasted at Hubert’s—with family plus some curious neighborhood friends who were eager to meet Cate. Cate acted as our translator for both evenings, easily flipping back and forth from French to English and back again to English from French. There were as many as twelve adults depending on her to translate, and we were all amazed—but no one more so than my husband and myself. I think I heard “Incroyable!” dozens of times during our suppers. I said very little (for a change). I could not find a word in any language. I simply held her hand and gazed at the little French girl sitting next to me.

We spent a few days in Paris before our return home. I wish I had captured on film the astonishment/surprise/shock of cab drivers, waiters, clerks, and other Parisians who heard her speak French with them and English with us. She grew tired of explaining, “Yes, we were her American parents. No, she wasn’t born in France.” Leo and I, however, never tired of hearing her quell their confusion. We were, forgive me for saying so, enormously proud!

When we returned home and visited her new school where she was to begin 7th grade, the native French teacher, after interviewing Cate for placement in the French program, became distracted, unable to contain her enthusiasm: “This child is fluent. No American accent whatsoever! INCROYABLE! INCROYABLE!” That’s one French word I’ve come to know.

My daughter eats mussels (but complains that they’re not as good as her maman made for her) and shrimp, red onions and eggplant and tomatoes and green beans, none of which she would touch before her trip to France. She begs me to buy a crepe maker so that she can once again taste the traditional Brittany meal she enjoyed with her French family on Friday evenings. She longs to have wind surfing lessons here in San Diego, her favorite sport she enjoyed with her French sister Marie-Noelle. They are all little changes that amuse her dad and me.

But the real meaning of the exchange is in everyday mini-miracles, when we see that Cate is an international child—eager to try new ways, learn a third language, and meet more friends from around the world. It is not my daughter who is incroyable; it is the experience of the program.

Best wishes for an INCROYABLE exchange.

Leo, Eileen, and Cate Sullivan (California USA)

Sally + little sister & brother



Alma & little sister



Ruth Lucas
Email du 16/02/06

Dear Jacques,

At the end of her first full day in America Alma is doing well. She and Sally managed to stay awake until 7pm last night making it a 21 hr day. Alma is a little quiet but seems happy and has eaten everything offered to her! Today we visited school and met the girl's teachers - it seemed as if Sally was more worried than Alma and she was a little overwhelmed at seeing her friends again and being the centre of attention. Philippa is happy to see Alma again and Simon is very natural with his second French sister. The children have all played some games and watched some of the Winter Olympics.

It was wonderful for me to be able to spend 4 days with the Dillys in Nieppe and to see where both girls had made a home, gone to school etc. I was very moved to see the tears shed by Sally and her classmates as she said goodbye and then to see the same picture when she had her final moments with her French cousins, grandparents etc. It was clear that they had welcomed both Sally and Philippa and made them part of their family. We feel blessed to have been matched with them and grateful that they continued with the exchange despite the move to China and all the planning involved. Marie did a wonderful job whilst being a single parent for the last 6 weeks of having 4 daughters.

We are looking forward to Alma being a part of our family and will do our best to make her feel comfortable with her American life and language.

Best Regards,
Ruth

De : Deniseatol@aol.com [mailto:Deniseatol@aol.com]

Envoyé : mardi 18 novembre 2008 14:50

À : jacques@enfamille.com

Objet : update

Dearest Jacques and Katherine,

I hope that this email finds you both very well and happy.

How the time has flown since the end of Vincent and Robert's exchange. I make regular contact with the Gonnet's and hope that our friendship will continue for a very long time.

Robert has settled well back into his school life more confident, wiser and independent, for which we are very grateful to you both for your part in this. As he once said to me whilst he was in France "this is the best thing you have ever done for me", high praise indeed!!, to which I must agree.

Robert may take his French examinations next summer (2 years early!!!) if we can make his written work the same level as his spoken French, which he is working very hard at!

I have spoken to lots of people about En Famille and they have seen for themselves the positive outcomes of this on Robert's holistic development. I hope that it comes to fruition and they pursue their interest by contacting you.

As Robert has now completed his exchange, could you please forward a form BN1.8 as I could not find it on the website, (which, I might add is excellent).

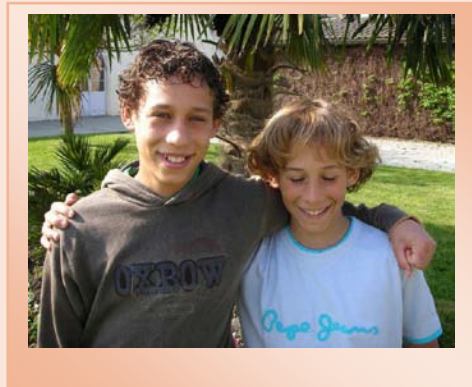
I look forward to hearing from you.

Sending you our very fondest regards,
Denise (Tolhurst) et al.

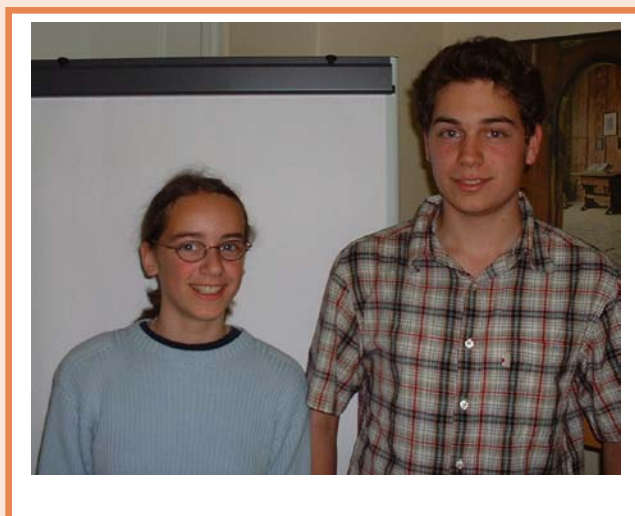


Robert & brother & sister

Vincent and his brother



Rebecca & her brother



-----Message d'origine-----

De : Rebecca Poesch [mailto:PREbecca@web.de]

Envoyé : mardi 9 décembre 2008 21:21

À : jacques@enfamille.com

Objet : <kein Betreff>

Dear Jacques,

Five years ago I went for an exchange to Wales. Thinking back, I see a time full joy and challenges. It has been a great experience for me and I still often benefit from it. And I am aware of how much "en famille" has done for me.

I want to thank you very much that you have always clung to the original idea of a non-commercial association. I remember my exchange in such a positive way, because I always felt occupied by "en famille" by people I got to know personally and because you have chosen my family with such a fine feeling. The friendship with my exchange-partner Bronia has become quite deep. The last time we met was when she invited me for the summer-holidays. And before we have spent lots of holidays together going skiing and visiting her family's farm in Africa. I am sure, this contact will last for a life-time!

Besides I would like to pronounce that it is not only the wonderful time that was made possible by the careful family choice, but it also protects the child from bad experiences. And a child can get hurt so easily...

Because of these aspects I want to thank you all. I am sure that I speak in the name of everyone who went for an exchange with "en famille" and everyone who is a future participator.

I wish you all the best for the future developments of "en famille" and many easily solved problems.

Best wishes and a lovely Christmastime,

Yours, Rebecca

(Rebecca Poesch)

De : Amy Van Vranken [mailto:we_b_sane@yahoo.com]

Envoyé : mercredi 21 janvier 2009 20:04

À : jacques@enfamille.com

Objet : Sadie

Dear Jacques,

I wanted to write to share some good news. We just received Sadie's report card for her first semester back at her American school—and she got *an A in every class!* She was not at all comfortable with English at first when she came back from France. She started school the day after she returned, and her grades were a little low in her first two weeks home, but soon enough she made up for that and was up to all A's by the end of the semester. *And*, to add to her challenges, she had missed the first 12 days of the school year because she was still in France! This is the best report card she's received in years.

It must be true that studying another language in a foreign country actually helps kids do better in school!

Thanks (again) for a wonderful program.

Amicalement,

Amy

A photo of Sadie before she left !



And Sadie after her six months in France !



I see you're using photos in your new testimonies page (nice idea--looks great!) Here's one of Sadie in France if you want to use it. She's holding the book that is her favorite in English--"A Wrinkle in Time" by Madeleine L'Engle. Finding it in French was great--since she had it almost memorized in English she learned a lot of French by reading it!

De : Amy Harris Van Vranken [mailto:we_b_sane@yahoo.com]

Envoyé : mardi 14 juillet 2009 19:35

À : Jacques EF1

Objet : Sadie's French test

Dear Jacques,

Another feather for En Famille's cap:

Sadie took the Advanced Placement (AP) French Language test this past spring, at age 11, nine months after returning from her exchange to France, to document her level of French in a way American schools and universities would understand.

Before Sadie's exchange (USA-France), she didn't know a word of French. After the exchange, she had tutoring one hour a week from a local university student to help strengthen her writing skills.

We just received her report, and she scored a 4! (scores range from low of 1 to high of 5.)

Maybe you're familiar with it--the AP test is usually only taken by a few 18-year-olds who feel they've achieved the highest level in a particular subject after studying it for 4-6 years. It allows students who receive a good score to receive university credit for their work.

I can't tell you how impressive this is to Americans, to receive a 4 at age 11 without taking a single school class in French. If you want me or Sadie to write something about it for En Famille's materials, let me know.

And THANK YOU again!!

Amy

