

Buon giorno a tutti - spero che questo ti trovi bene.

I am so sorry I haven't emailed sooner, I have been so busy these past few weeks, settling in with my new family, school and the overall shock of going on exchange.

I would like to thank you all for allowing me to have the incredible opportunity, supporting me and sponsoring me. These things I will always be grateful for. Also, thank you to Shirley and John True, for helping me and the other exchange students through the airports, we all really appreciated it! I hope you had a wonderful holiday in Rome, and if what I've seen of the North of Italy is any indication, it would have been absolutely gorgeous. Thank you to Craig, my wonderful counsellor for helping me to get ready, and everyone else who was involved in the last few weeks of the preparation of my departure, making me feel very certain and sure that I was doing the right thing.

I really am having a blast. Italy is so stunning, and I might have one of the best host families I could have hoped for. From the moment I arrived, my host mother and father (Nadia and Gianluca), and my host siblings (Sofia – 19yo, Angelica – 17yo, currently in AUS on exchange in Gloucester, and Pietro – 13yo) were incredibly kind and welcoming, and I really feel like a part of the family and very much at home. They are all such good people, and I've had almost no problems with them and the way that their family functions.

School is difficult, but as I learn more and more Italian, I am starting to get a concept of what the students are learning in class, just not enough to learn myself...! We go to school for 6 days a week, but I also have free hours because it is hard for me as an exchange student to sit through five hours of solid Italian every day! I study maths, science, geography, history, religion, physical education, Italian, English and Spanish. Every student in the class can speak English very well, but in order for me to learn Italian I've asked them only to speak English when I don't understand what they are saying in Italian, or in English class. I have made some really good friends who like spending time with me and asking about Australia, and I'm really happy.

I have not attended a Rotary meeting yet, but I have met my counsellor, Doctor Fabio Stock. The Australian "newbies" also had a briefing, where we met Laura Brianza, who is in charge of the Rotary Youth program for our District. Doctor Stock is very straightforward, but nice with good intentions. He is, however, not very good at responding to text messages, emails or calls, so Nadia and I have been corresponding with another Rotary representative, Marta Pessina. She is the Area Officer for the Como/Cantu area, and has been helping me sort out the Italian lessons,

supplies for these lessons, my monthly allowance, and transport to and from school and Italian lessons.

I am very happy to be finally taking Italian lessons for two days a week, even though I do have to travel to Milan with the train and the metro for over an hour to get there. The lessons in Milan are with the other exchange students, Australians and others, and although the Aussies have a few more weeks of lessons than I do, I'm keeping up. The other exchange students are very nice, both in the district and in Como. They are very friendly and willing to help the newbies (us Aussies) with anything we need. We are going to have a pot-luck in Milan in a few weeks where we will all bring a plate of food special from our country and share it with everyone.

We all went to Venice on the 10th of February as a district, which was amazing. That city is quite a stunning work of art, and the atmosphere was incredible. Carnevale is this week, and even though we went almost a month before, Venice was starting to get set up for one of the biggest celebrations it has all year. There were countless masks and costumes and confetti for sale everywhere, and so many people! There is another trip with the district scheduled for the beginning of May, to the South! We are going to Naples, Pompeii, Matera and Lecce, which are only a few of the cities. This means amazing food and beautiful countryside, so if I were you, I'd keep an eye out for lots of photos coming your way.

On Monday the 4th (this month) I went to see Milan for the first time. It's stunning, but I definitely prefer Lake Como and the mountains. The lake is so huge, and on Sunday morning I try to persuade my family to go to the lake and the Centre of Domo for mass first in the Duomo, and then for a walk around the lake. It's the best! The mountains surround the lake, and the only word I can use to describe them is the word powerful.

Again, I am so sorry I haven't written to you at all. If you want I can update you every two weeks or every month, whatever you prefer!

Thank you all again so much, and I will be in contact!

Ciao – Bella