



ALYTE KATILIUS/WYOMING TRIBUNE EAGLE

French exchange student Marion Crouzier, 16, right, passes a bison bladder to Cheyenne Central student Anna Groth, 18, during a visit to the Wyoming State Museum in Cheyenne on Thursday. "Most Wyoming kids have learned this stuff and gotten to touch this stuff before," said Groth. "But that's always my favorite part, the organs." Crouzier had a slightly different point of view. "I was like, this is disgusting," she recalled.

French exchange students spend time in Cheyenne

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Wyoming Tribune Eagle

CHEYENNE — With a Metro ticket and a whole day in Paris, Cheyenne's Central High School student Elizabeth Stump found her confidence.

Last summer, Stump was one of 14 Central High School students to visit Lycée Chaptal in Mende, a rural town in southern France, with CHS teacher Sarah Evans. This month, she's one of 11 Cheyenne families to host French students for three weeks.

Stump's exchange student is attending Central classes and extracurricular activities, from dance to the Mayor's Youth Council.

Together, the students are practicing both their French and English skills, learning about each other's lives. Seeing the world from another person's point of view, Stump said, expands your mind. It also gives you confidence.

"Just speaking French is a neat skill to have, but also, on the trip to Paris, Madame Evans gave us a free day," Stump said. "We were by ourselves in Paris with a Metro card. Having that experience on your own, it's hands-on. You really become confident in yourself and your language skills. You're self-sufficient in a way. I could actually have a real conversation with a French person."

Anna Groth is also a senior at Central who is hosting a French student this month. She went on the summer 2022 trip

and said it's amazing to have access to cross-cultural connections in Cheyenne.

"Being around people who have a different way of life, who have different beliefs than you and who you might not be exposed to in your day-to-day life, especially at our age, can make you such a better person," Groth said. "You're learning how to open up your life, be cordial and empathetic and helpful. I think that all of the kids who have experienced this are excited and thankful for the ability to grow in this way."

Groth began taking French classes in seventh grade and has advanced to French 5. She's earning college credits and working toward a certificate of bilit-eracy. She's in her second year as president of the French Club and is a member of CHS's French National Honor Society, the only chapter in Wyoming. She plans to study medicine in college with a minor in French.

"I've loved all of the connections we've made and all of the learning we've done," she said. "Hosting a student has been so cool — to be on the other side of it, and to share our day-to-day lives, our food, our activities and our traditions."

As a senior, Groth is taking her student along on senior nights, prom dress shopping and showing her how she's preparing for graduation. Groth said she tries to speak English with her host student, but sometimes, they slip into French.

"One day in school in a different language feels like two," she said.

Evans and her husband, both Wyoming natives, worked as English language assistants in Mende from 2014-16. Mende is home to about 12,000 people, and the couple was able to establish friendships that have lasted. Evans started a pen pal exchange in 2016 when she began teaching at Central and slowly created the exchange program with her French colleagues. Travel plans were canceled in 2020.

"This last year, we finally made it happen with some students coming here, and of course, we traveled there," Evans said.

One of the most exciting things for a student might be experiencing everyday high school life in a different country, she said.

"To go to class, to eat in the cafeteria, it's an experience. French cafeteria food puts ours to shame. It's really good," she said with a laugh.

Last summer, Central students were able to kayak the Causse de Mende, a beautiful area that leads to the mountains and is full of canyons and gorges. The students saw stone buildings that were several hundred years old and toured a medieval cathedral. They spent five days in Paris.

While in Cheyenne, the French students will visit the state Capitol, tour the Wyoming State Museum, meet with Mayor Patrick Collins, attend an East-Central basketball game and participate in a French Club cooking project and dance.

Students/ from A3

A number of the French students are involved in a model European Union project back home, in which they're discussing energy issues.

"They're working on the question of energy, which, obviously, in Wyoming, is very much a part of our economy. They're hoping to interview our mayor, and hopefully lawmakers, to bring that perspective to this big model European Union event in southern France," Evans said.

High school is a time in students' lives where young adults become more aware of the world outside of their immediate existence, she said.

"Their experiences can have a pretty substantial impact on them," she said. "These are really big things for students at this age to experience."

Stump has dreams of becoming an international relations attorney, using her French skills along the way. She began taking French as a freshman, which could be

considered "late," she said. But Evans helped her get ahead, teaching her French 4 outside of class time so she could join French 5 during her senior year.

"Madame Evans is a super great teacher," Stump said. "She was also so great at leading the trip."

In French 5, the students no longer focus on grammar and vocabulary but use the French they have learned in real-life discussions.

"We're using French to talk about super complex issues. The other day, we were talking about surrogacy and architecture and food," Stump said. "We talk about things that you can barely talk about in English, honestly."

On the 2022 summer trip, Groth experienced a burst in fluency that has continued into French 5, she said. They spent months preparing for the trip, although being dropped into a French-speaking country was a challenge.

"The immersion will shock you, no matter what. Just being around people whose

native language is French was so different," Groth said. "We speak fast in English, of course, and the same goes for French. It's an experience for both parties involved, for the host student and the traveling student. You're always trying to have full conversations and get things across."

That might begin, she said, with simple directions to the bathroom.

"But by the end of the trip, I remember distinctly sitting down with my host family at dinner. My host mom was talking at a pretty normal pace, and we were talking about gun rights and women's rights, and complicated cultural issues that they had seen on the news," Groth said. "They were like, 'Why is that different over there?' It was incredible, truly."

Carrie Haderlie is a freelance journalist who covers southeast Wyoming from her home near Saratoga. She has written for the Wyoming Tribune Eagle, Laramie Boomerang, Wyoming Business Report and several other publications for many years, including covering the Wyoming Legislature.