

Scholar Experience Spotlight: Mariya Mason's Study Abroad in Kenya

In summer 2025, Mariya Mason, a Link Unlimited Scholar and senior at Fenwick High School, participated in a two-week AFS study abroad program in Kenya, her first time traveling internationally. The experience expanded her worldview and deepened her understanding of culture, community, and global responsibility.

Alongside a diverse cohort of students from the U.S. and Hong Kong, Mariya explored climate change, wildlife conservation, and cultural traditions. One of the most impactful lessons came from studying environmental changes near Lake Naivasha and seeing firsthand how climate shifts affect education, infrastructure, and daily life.

A major highlight of the program was living with a Maasai host family. Mariya learned about traditional medicine, gender roles, and cultural etiquette rooted in respect and shared responsibility. Adjusting to customs, such as never refusing food, pushed her beyond her comfort zone and reinforced the importance of honoring local traditions.

The most meaningful part of the trip was volunteering at a local orphanage. "It was just so fun being able to be around kids," Mariya shared. "Learning from them, but also them learning from us."

Reflecting on her overall experience, Mariya said one of her biggest takeaways was realizing that "happiness doesn't come from material things." She saw how fulfillment is rooted in family, culture, and community, not possessions.

Despite moments of culture shock, Mariya returned home with a renewed sense of gratitude and a broader perspective on the world. Inspired by her journey, she hopes to fundraise for projects in Kenya, encourage other students to study abroad, and mentor future participants. Mariya's experience reflects how global learning helps Link Scholars grow into thoughtful, globally minded leaders.