

I have been avidly following many of the Bolshoi Ballet dancers for years and consequently, had learned a little about their Russian culture. When I heard that the NSLI-Y/ RAF exchange program not only offered an opportunity to train at the Academy but also a chance to learn the language and interact with Russian citizens, it was like a dream come true. This scholarship gave me a unique and exciting opportunity to live and interact with the people of Russia and to experience firsthand the power of language to create bonds across cultures. I was also able to promote a positive image of the United States and my community as well as learn more about a different culture and language for my own. I feel like this was accomplished through not only my interactions with the Russian students from the academy but also my experiences with my host family. The experiences I had and things that I learned throughout the 9 weeks were immeasurable. It was eye-opening to be immersed into a different way of life. I didn't just learn about a different culture, I also found out a lot about myself and our American culture. I grew to appreciate small things that I take for granted here, such as air conditioning, ice, and my own bed. Having said this, I truly miss the Russian language, my teachers, the passionate work ethic and dedication of the people, and most of all, all of my new friends and "family". It was absolutely an experience of a lifetime. Although this trip could never be duplicated, I hope that sometime soon I will have an opportunity to return to Moscow to visit the Academy and my friends.

Alexis, NSLI-Y 2010 Finalist