

Read the following case study. How could this situation have been avoided?  
Consider what may be lacking in the team's Support structure.

Pim from Thailand has been on program for about three months now. She wanted to do an AFS program in the United States in order to experience a different way of life and improve her English skills. She lives with the Smith family in New Paltz, NY. The Smith family wanted to host an exchange student in order to learn about a different culture, and provide a happy learning experience for a young person from another country.

With Thanksgiving right around the corner, the Smiths are looking forward to showing Pim an authentic American holiday. But they are starting to feel that Pim is not interested in their family and their customs, because she spends most of her time in her bedroom texting with other Thai exchange students. During family meals, Pim keeps her eyes lowered and doesn't initiate conversations. When the Smiths ask her what she's learning in school, she only gives brief non-detailed responses.

Pim heard of the passing of Thailand's King Bhumibol from her fellow Thai exchange students, who she communicates with frequently through Whatsapp. In Thailand, people are mourning but are also unified by the shared loss. Pim feels left out of the events happening in her country. But Pim doesn't want to inconvenience her host family by sharing this problem. She begins to feel isolated both from her friends and family at home, and the host family and friends in the host community.

Pim sends an email to her liaison, Geri, asking for a meeting. Several days go by before Geri responds that she is out of town and will set up a meeting when she gets back next week. A week passes and there is no word from Geri. Pim isn't very familiar with other volunteers, and doesn't reach out to anyone else in the team. She begins to spend more and more time seeking comfort in the group of Thai students she texts with.

Meanwhile the Smiths reach out to Geri (who is unresponsive) as well as Tina, the Support Coordinator. Tina speaks with them by phone and offers suggestions on how to bring Pim out of her shell. The Smiths ask Tina to visit and speak with Pim face-to-face. But Tina lives in Huntington, which is more than two hours away by car. She works full time and has personal engagements on weekends. The Smiths are discouraged but try to ignore Pim's moodiness as a phase. Pim has trouble understanding how the Smiths can be so unaffected by the King's death. They aren't mourning at all. They don't even talk about it!

Pim continues to isolate herself in the next several weeks and the Smiths become increasingly frustrated with the perceived lack of appreciation for their family. When relatives arrive for Thanksgiving, Pim doesn't come out of her bedroom to greet them. At dinner she is quiet and uncomfortable. The next day, the Smiths call Tina and request that Pim be removed from their home.