



## CFHS's Olivia Anderson part of on-line foreign exchange program

Seventeen-year old Olivia Anderson, an 11<sup>th</sup> grader at Cannon Falls High School, recently completed a virtual, four-week exchange with a 16-year old girl living in India. Their mission was to share insights and information on their respective cultures, values, and the challenges teens face growing up in the modern world as a way to empower kids in both countries.

Anderson is the most recent student to join the Global Student Dynamic (GSD) Network ([www.gsdnetwork.net](http://www.gsdnetwork.net)) – a global youth action program that connects American youth as peers and partners to international teens growing up amidst the world's biggest challenges. The program is run by Dina Fesler, a rural Cannon Falls resident.

In preparation for the exchange Anderson began by reading GSD's backstory about a group of girls living in a slum of Pune, India, where Fesler has been working for the past eight years to encourage education for girls.

"Growing up in a slum is about more than lack of infrastructure and violence," said Fesler. "It is important American teens understand the interconnectedness of poverty, lack of education, and gender oppression before they can be effective partners and communicators. They need to understand the world these kids come from."

Afterward, the GSD website paired Anderson with 16-year old Komal Thakur to engage in four weeks of focused discussions that compared and contrasted everything from geography, religion, and population (Olivia's neighborhood has 7,000 people; Komal's neighborhood has 700,000) to social expectations for girls and women, to the impact of technology and media on relationships, as well as the challenges teens struggle to overcome.

Anderson said while she and her peers worry if they have the latest generation of smart phone technology, Komal just learned how to use the internet as part of this GSD program.

"Most of the teenagers of our society are worried about their career and education," said Komal. "My friend's father will fix her marriage if she doesn't pass the 10<sup>th</sup> grade exam."

Completion of the GSD program requires participants to teach what they learned to other students in their community. Anderson recently presented a PowerPoint to Missy Klapperich's Cannon Falls Middle School reading class, and invited other students to take part in the GSD program.

"American students are so isolated globally," said Fesler. "They need a program like this to understand why things are the way they are and to navigate a successful future with their international peers," says Fesler.

