

Learning More about the Rotary Youth Exchange Program

Story by Ed Kolybaba on Jan 12, 2022



Martha Kennedy, District 5060 Youth Exchange Chair and member of the Rotary Club of Kelowna Sunrise, through the use of PowerPoint provided a comprehensive overview of the Rotary Youth Exchange (RYE) program at the clubs regular (zoom) meeting on January 07, 2022.



Using a quiz as her source, she provided an overview of the early years of the RYE program and then covered various 'need to know' topics, including a number of myths about the program, the need for Rotary International certification to participate in the program, the essential responsibilities of Rotary volunteers, the application process for students wishing to be selected as an exchange student, the obligations

of the selected exchange students, and the role of club members in supporting the exchange program.

The first Rotary Youth Exchange took place in 1929 between the Rotary Clubs of Copenhagen, Denmark and Nice, France, but this exchange was not a yearlong experience as we know it today, but rather an exchange for a couple of weeks during a school vacation; "but it was the start of a great beginning," expressed Kennedy.

The first year long exchange program took place in 1958 when a student left Scottsbluff, Nebraska to live in Myrtleford Australia while two Australians arrived from Myrtleford to live in Grand Lake Colorado! Today, 80 countries in all regions of the world participate in the Rotary Youth Exchange program.

Over 9000 students worldwide have participated in the program. To bring about a program that generates an exciting and successful program for this number of students, it takes a host of volunteers. According to Kennedy, it takes approximately five Rotarians volunteering for each student. Youth exchange officers, counselors and host families make up this cadre of volunteers who work cooperatively to ensure that the experience is successful.

Kennedy explained that RYE students must agree and must adhere to four basic rules that included no drinking, no driving, no drugs and no dating or serious relationships; and they must participate in predatory and debriefing activities.



There is a role for every Rotarian in supporting the program stressed Kennedy. Rotarians can get involved by serving on the Youth Committee; they can host a student for a 14 to 16 week period; they can serve as a counselor/advocate for the student; and/or they can help in recruiting students by encouraging students to apply, by helping with interviews, and by putting themselves out there to learn more about the culture of the inbound student.

The Rotary Club of Kelowna Sunrise has been a strong advocate and an active participant in the Rotary Youth Exchange program since it was chartered in 1976. The club's first experience with the program involved hosting an inbound student, Luz Carmen del Gomez from Mexico, during the 1987-88 Rotary year. Two years later the club sponsored their first outbound student, Julie Mawhinney, who was hosted in Belgium for the 1990-91 Rotary year.

Since that time, 31 young people from our community have participated in the program, traveling and enjoying an exciting cultural and educational experience second to none in a total of 18 different countries. The program also enabled 36 inbound students from 21 different countries from 1987/88 to 2019/20 to enjoy an exciting adventure in Canada, particularly the Okanagan.

It has not been since 2019-20 that the club has sponsored or hosted an exchange student, Kaya Hahn to Italy and Arnaud Quirante Viladrich from Spain.

Unfortunately the club, and for that matter Rotary International, has not continued with the RYE program because of the covid pandemic. It is expected that the program will get back on track when covid has been fully contained.