

How Can I Make the World a Better Place? Rotary's Commitment to Service Above Self

Many of us might have wondered at some point in our life — usually when we are choosing what degree to do at university or after we finished our studies when we were choosing which career pathway to follow — ‘how can my education and work make this world a better place?’ or ‘how can I make a difference in the life of other human beings?’



The answer to these questions often is just around the corner from where you live, where your local Rotary club is teaming up to plan for its next community project.

For over 100 years, Rotary has opened a world of possibilities to individuals who are passionate about taking action against global challenges such as poverty, conflict resolution, education, and clean water for all — among many other issues that the organisation has been involved with.

This article takes a brief look at Rotary and the widely-recognised important role it has played — and is still playing — in the world.

What is Rotary?

Rotary is a global network of millions of volunteers around the world, united to solve some of the world's most challenging problems and make a difference in the lives of people and communities.

Rotary is comprised of three parts:

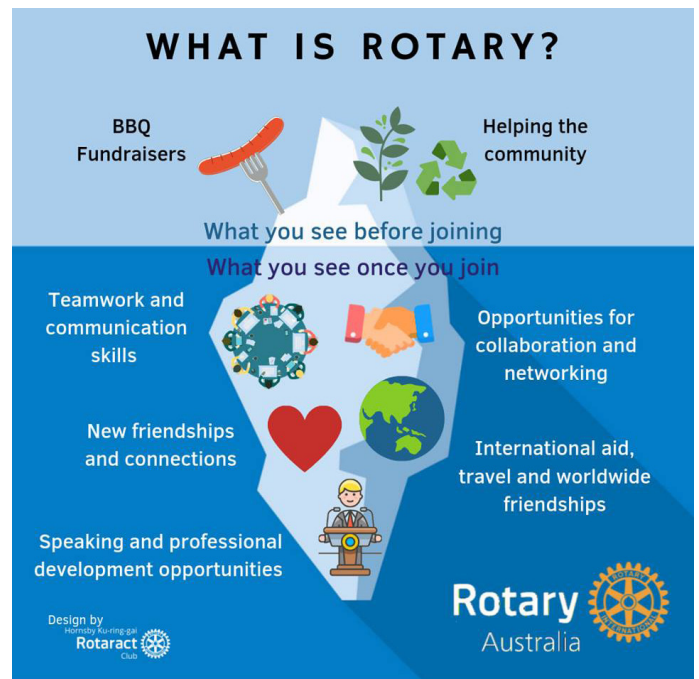
Rotary International

Rotary International is an association of 1.2 million people from all walks of life, disciplines, professions, gender, age, religion and ethnicity, volunteering their time and talents to serve their communities and the world.

The organisation currently has six areas of focus in which its global membership seeks to create change: promote peace; fight disease; provide clean water, sanitation, and hygiene; save mothers and children; support education; and grow local economies.

Rotary Foundation

The mission of Rotary Foundation of Rotary International is to enable Rotarians to advance world understanding, goodwill and peace through the improvement of health, the support of education and the alleviation of poverty. During the past 100 years, the Foundation has spent \$3 billion on life-changing, sustainable projects.



The Rotary Foundation has established Peace Centres in six universities around the world and has trained over 1,400 graduates at Masters, or Professional Certificate levels in peace and conflict resolution.

Rotary Clubs

Rotary unite dedicated people into local Rotary clubs to exchange ideas, build relationships and take action to resolve issues in their communities.

Rotary International is an association of more than 33,000 Rotary clubs in over 200 countries and geographical areas.

Rotary is a dedicated group of people who share a passion for community service. Rotary members share ideas, make plans, hear from the community, and then take action to make the necessary changes in their community. The funds for those community services are raised through local projects and activities — like a sausage sizzle or a local book fair. However, the dedication of Rotary Clubs to their communities, the camaraderie and fellowship of Rotarians and their perseverance to raise money for the betterment of their communities mean that together they raise thousands of dollars that will make a difference in the lives of people in their communities who need their assistance.

So What in the World is Rotary Doing?

Rotary has many significant local and global initiatives underway at the moment. The signature project that Rotary has long been working on, and fighting for, is the eradication of polio.

Rotary began its fight against polio in 1979 with a project to immunize 6 million children in the Philippines. To date, Rotary has immunised 2.5 billion children against polio and the disease is endemic in only three countries (Afghanistan, Nigeria and Pakistan) — down from 125 in 1988 when 350,000 cases of polio were reported.

In 2019, there has only been 56 cases of polio.

In order to achieve its global, long-lasting impact, Rotary has partnered with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the World Health Organization, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and UNICEF to make the world polio-free.

“When Rotarians combine the passion for service along with the power of a global network, you are unstoppable,” said Gates Foundation CEO Jeff Raikes at a Rotary convention when the Gates Foundation announced their commitment to Rotary’s mission of worldwide polio eradication.

To date, Rotary clubs worldwide have contributed USD \$1,200,000,000 (\$1.2 billion) to polio eradication effort.

In Australia, there are 1,100 Rotary clubs, one of which is The Rotary Club of Carlton. Since 1985, the Rotary Club of Carlton has supported innumerable international, national and local projects. These include the Ronald McDonald House, Carlton Junior Football Club, swimming and safety lessons for refugee children, Carlton Primary School, the National Youth Science Forum, the Rotary Youth Leadership Award, the Rotary Youth Program of Enrichment, homeless services for young people, Mental Health First Aid courses in high schools, support of Australian Rotary Health’s mental health research, Rotary programs against polio and malaria, and education of girls in Afghanistan.



Students learning about CPR at a swimming and safety program funded by the Rotary Club of Carlton (RCC).



Carlton Primary School at the beach with RCC.

Rotary then — to answer the question ‘What is Rotary?’ — is when the simple and small things collide with the best of intentions to serve humanity and to be a Rotarian is simply is to have a desire to do something good to help others and a make a difference.

‘I’m not really sure what Rotary does, but I’m happy to come along’: Ian Riseley’s Story

Ian H. S. Riseley is an Australian accountant and businessman, who served as the President of Rotary International from 2017 to 2018. He was the fifth Australian to be the President of Rotary International.

Riseley’s earliest exposure to Rotary was typical of what many newcomers to the organisation experience: He wasn’t sure what to make of it. In 1977, he was the owner of an accounting firm when one of his clients invited him to speak at the Rotary Club of Cheltenham. “My first question,” Riseley says, “was, ‘About what?’” His second: “What’s a Rotary club?”

Riseley recalls that, “I said, ‘I’m not really sure what Rotary does, but I’m happy to come along. The movers and shakers were all there, so I thought, wow, what a group to be involved with.’” He became a charter member of the Rotary Club of Sandringham in 1978, when he started contributing to the community with a project of constructing shelter for commuters, particularly seniors, waiting for the bus in Sandringham.

Riseley’s enthusiasm for Rotary faced a challenge, however, when the question of admitting women as members arose in the early 1980s. When membership for women became a contested issue, he says, “I thought to myself, how crazy is that? What sort of organisation says no to half of the population? So I resigned.”

The president of his club said, “Let me recommend that you don’t resign. We encourage you to agitate from the inside to invite women to be part of Rotary.” Soon after, Rotary changed its constitution in 1989, welcoming women as members.

Riseley embraces the idea that Rotary is a place where people network and make professional connections while doing good in the world. In response to the question ‘why should people join Rotary?’, Riseley says, the most important reason is “the chance to make a difference in the world. If someone asked me to eradicate polio, my ability to do this would be rather limited. But when you gather together with 1.2 million people of like mind and have people like Bill and Melinda Gates donate funds to help achieve this objective, the opportunity for success is far greater.”

If you want to learn more about Rotary and how you could be involved, come along to the October meeting of the Rotary Club of Carlton at Graduate House on 7th October to hear from Ian about Rotary and how you can help make the world a better place. ❖❖❖