

Good Morning, my name is Zahra Forbutt and around a month ago I was fortunate enough to attend the Rotary Youth Program of Enrichment, or RYPEN, and I am here today to give you a brief overview of my experience. Firstly, however, I would like to say a big thank you to the Rotary Club of Surfers Sunrise for sponsoring me, I greatly appreciate your support and the opportunity it provided.

Shockingly, it was raining when I arrived at the Bornhoffen PCYC camp at Natural Bridge and it was a little nerve wracking, because I was stepping out of my comfort zone. I didn't know what to expect and only knew one other person who was attending. I didn't know what the food would be like, what the beds would be like and most importantly, what the other people would be like. But I was to learn over the next few days, that stepping out of your comfort zone can bring some fabulous results.

The rain didn't dampen the enthusiasm of Daniel, one of the RYPEN Purple Shirts, who met me in the car park. His enthusiasm and engaging manner immediately made me feel welcome, and we chatted all the way from the carpark to the registration desk, with Daniel asking me questions about myself and my expectations for camp. This initial warm and supportive introduction, proved to be the standard for the whole camp and all the Purple Shirt leaders.

Over the next few days, I got to know the students and supervisors and formed several friendships that have continued outside of camp. In fact, getting to meet and build new friendships with people who came from various schools, cultures and backgrounds, was one of the best aspects of the RYPEN experience.

Throughout the weekend, we participated in many activities, including the Ironman championship and the Olympiad, which had us in team competing in relays where you rolled a vegemite covered apple with your nose, passed flour filled containers over each others heads, and tried dressing a person in paper. All these activities were aimed at strengthening our skills in teamwork, communication and leadership.

The guest speaker presentations were a highlight of the camp. My favourites included an inspirational boxer who spoke of how he became dependent on drugs at the age of ten and hit rock bottom, but turned his life around and now promotes the importance of mental health, and another being a representative from the youth charity Borderline who spoke to us about Confetti Moments, teaching us the importance of recognising and celebrating the small moments which make up everyday life. The weekend was jam packed with many other shows and activities, including a magician who taught us that life isn't always what it seems, and that perspective is everything, to a talent show and circus night.

I was awarded the Team Spirit Captaincy for my group, for demonstrating compassion, support and leadership throughout the weekend, with members of my group and members within the RYPEN camp. Overall, RYPEN was an amazing experience, that allowed me the opportunity to meet new people, strengthen my teamwork and communication skills and further develop my leadership abilities, and I am extremely grateful for the opportunity and thankful that Surfers Sunrise Rotary sponsored me and the Rotary provides this program for today's youth.