

1. It's good to be back, and in the flesh might I add, happy Day 1 Level 1!
I've presented a couple of times on the information this evening but both times over Zoom, and let me tell you it's great to be speaking to real life-size human beings, rather than little itty-bitty square faces on a computer screen.

For those of you I haven't met, my name is Grace Cussell and I have been involved with Rotary since being sponsored by the Howick Club to attend a Rotary Youth Exchange to Denmark in 2016. I have since completed District 9920 RYLA, again, thanks to Howick Club's sponsorship in 2018 ...and I just keep finding my way back here.

No in more ways than one, I am forever grateful to hold this tie to Howick Rotary and the neighbourhood I grew up in. This year I'm actually back in Howick spending some time living with my grandmother just up from Cockle Bay beach as she's in need of a young helping hand at the moment, so it's nice to be back again after flatting in town last year and I hope to bump into some of you on the main Picton Street drag.

So how have I weazled my way back this evening, you may ask. Well I hope you've figured it out... I'm here to speak to you about the inaugural RYLA Oceania, which if you remember, we're about halfway in to 2020 and I'd say there've been maybe 2 weeks without chaos or some apocalyptic event this year. 2 weeks might be a bit generous. But this period occurred right between the Australian bushfires subsiding and COVID19 setting in. This was at the end of January/beginning of Feb and 24 young people from across Australia and NZ were very lucky that RYLA Oceania was hosted at this time.



GRACE CUSSELL

So only 24 people. For context, District 9920 RYLA has 120. This was always going to be a very different programme to District RYLA, and let me tell you it was, in the best way. As you can see from the slogan, RYLA Oceania was designed as a leadership programme for RYLarians who have completed RYLA and have since moved on to

their next stage of growth in life. They've gone back to their workplaces, implemented their learnings from their district RYLA and are now ready to expand even further. And I'm very grateful to say I've been able to do this in the past year or two. You will always hear me talking about how much Rotary has given me. Since RYLA in 2018, I've been able to make leaps on the path I'm on which would have not been possible without the Rotary Youth Development programmes I've been on.



THE LEAD UP

2. The combination of a few things led me to be selected for RYLA Oceania, all of which can be linked back somehow to my 2018 RYLA experience. The first is my work in the disability sector. So I'm a coordinator at Recreate NZ, a not for profit organisation providing opportunities across NZ to youth with disabilities, including my brother Max. Our team of just 12 run over 800 programmes a year and our average office age is 23.

On RYLA 2018 the participants were mentored through a social enterprise workshop by heads of banks and various people in the business sector. The flow on from that was the Rotary Newmarket Social Enterprise Awards which is a kind of dragon's den and since RYLA 2018 I've applied both years with initiatives I've been working on in the disability sector. In 2018, we were finalists, and last year, we won! The pitch was given by one of our participants Abigail who also happens to have down syndrome but we won on the merits of our start up, which is called MOXIE or meaningful opportunities crossing into employment. We're currently teaming up employers with our Recreate NZ youth to help end the heinously high unemployment rate for kiwis with disabilities.

A second degree of involvement I've maintained since RYLA 2018 was I'm now part of the core organising committee. The bottom right photo is of 7 of us last year, setting up radio towers across the island and breaking many a DOC rule in the process without seatbelts. It's the only photo I have from our work as we were clearly far too mission-focused. It's been incredible speaking to Rotary clubs Auckland-wide about the huge impact RYLA is having, and playing an instrumental

role in the behind the scenes build up to the week as taught me so much also. The idea is for eventually a lot of the planning to be passed on to us RYLarians to take over from Rotary.

Third and finally, as we know, there is a degree of Army involvement in RYLA, and I've since joined the ranks as a rifleman in the Army Reserves. This has not been a totally random decision, but instead a way which I see will hopefully put my law degree to good use once its completed in 2 years-time, as my goal is to commission as a legal officer to the Defence Force. The Reserves role has seen me complete some epic taskings including orchestrating the COVID19 quarantine hotels, where the top right photo is taken. It's also quite timely as just this morning I received confirmation of my placement on next month's officer selection board, so all going well, I may be commissioning as an officer sooner than expected.

BUT ANYWAY. Those are the kinds of things RYLA has helped me achieve, and the reason why in late January earlier this year, I flew to Sydney for...

RETREAT YEAR?



3. RYLA Oceania.

- reason why it says retreat week is it is a year-long programme and this week is just the beginning. Another difference to District RYLA.
- the programme was designed by 10 RYLarians all under 30, with minimal Rotary involvement. They saw a need for continued engagement and wanted to fill the gap.
- they designed the programme over the course of a year all via correspondence. The first time all 10 of them were together in the same room was actually on the first day of retreat.
- there were 24 participants, across 6 states and 4 islands, all who had completed ryla and were now ready to branch out further.
- we did this over the course of the week through all the classic things- amazing speakers, challenging events, and team building activities (reference photos)

-I don't want to discredit these things by skimming over them, but you've heard me talk about awesome youth programmes before. What I wanted to get into the nitty and gritty of was the year-long aspect, so:

4. -What made this event so outstanding was how deep we got into the essence of what RYLA is about.
 - There were only 24 of us, so we got pretty personal. We were all so different but within just a week we had all helped each other in pretty profound ways.
 - Some of the activities for example, (reference photo), involved us writing a setback that was really holding us back in life on a piece of wood, then breaking that piece of wood in half. You can see the suspense in the photo, I'll admit I was the last person to do it because I was so overwhelmed. But my mates helped me through.
 - The reason why all of this worked was due to Goals and Systems. Spent week analysing what we really wanted to get out of 8 categories, then within our smaller teams of 6 we would have spotlight sessions to grill and reflect on them. Can you imagine having that? We now have accountability buddies and spreadsheets to check back in monthly. And I honestly don't think I would've gotten through COVID without this. We've all stayed so connected through Facebook and our individual groups/buddies and are all keeping each other on track. 45 minute sessions, pretty special.
 - The facilitators from the week review our spreadsheets monthly, tell us how we're going and offer reports quarterly. We also have monthly sessions on further leadership development topics, last month was Ikigai, and we continue to have zoom sessions with speakers from across Oceania.



COMMUNITY PROJECTS

5. There's a second aspect to our work here and that's Community Projects
I've always said I want to give something back, now I can
Voices of Hope, Gen
Our project: signage

Connecting Rotary with boards, any help you can offer

The project management side of this has taught me so much.

Challenging working across countries and solely remotely, but RYLA Oceania was created all remotely as we know, and I'll actually touch more of this in a second.

6. 'Let RYLA Oceania begin' ended the retreat.

-This showed how the real part would all be remote. So cool. We plan to reunite in some form in February after a year, but unsure at the moment of course.

-So along with the personal goals and systems and community projects, I'm already seeing how RYLA Oceania is helping me in life.

-I probably wouldn't have achieved my Army goals so quickly or achieved so much during lockdown.

-Finally though, this programme has taught me the power we hold in 2020 to get things done, really. At the end of February we had to 'pay our dues' on RYPEN organising.

-COVID hit, had to cancel. BUT... (explain RYPEN online leadership curriculum)

-Decided to create a brand new online learning opportunity for students and show ourselves how much we've learnt in the process.

-Movement has gained traction across Oceania inspiring others to do the same with their youth programmes and we've spoken a number of times about it.

THE AFTERMATH



In closing, Rotary Youth programmes continue to help me uncover my purpose to live a useful life and I encourage you all to get involved if you want to reignite that spark, as it's not just participants who gain. I've learnt so much more from the organisational side of RYLA than I ever did as a participant. These presentations always turn into a plug. Thank you. And as always, feel free to ask any questions.