

Dan Dawson - Juneau

INTERACT/ROTARACT/YOUTH PROTECTION

This year above any other has been difficult. Perhaps most difficult for those students and younger people who have never felt such distress or hardship in their lives. Being cut off from friends and family, forced to learn new ways of learning and communicating, all kids are social. I work with teens and younger adults and have heard time and time again how COVID 19 has opened their eyes to a new reality where bad things can happen and there is no normalcy. Where they once found structure and balance, now there is uncertainty and chaos. I have also seen that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. These challenges have been met by our Interact students and Rotaract members. While the tasks are difficult and stakes are high our younger Rotarians have not shrunk away from the challenges that we face. If anything they have shown strength and fortitude in the face of hardship.

Right now in District 5010 we have a goal to start new Interact and Rotaract clubs. We have re-started the Juneau-Douglas Interact club and they are thriving holding online meetings, doing service projects and making a difference in lives of many, many people. The TMHS and Ketchikan Interact Clubs are doing very well with their service projects and meetings. Both clubs have membership over 50-students and hold weekly meetings. It is our goal to start more interact clubs throughout the state in the next several years.

Rotaract still meets in Juneau and we hope in Fairbanks. It has been harder to keep these clubs going during the pandemic. I am currently trying to form an e-Rotaract club that the entire district can participate in. We hope that this can be a theme club, perhaps an environmental club embracing a new avenue of service. Perhaps a peace collation club that would work with other districts and zones in peace keeping service projects or perhaps a mixture of both.

In the next few years we want to see progress in both Interact and Rotaract and grow our district. This is not easy and certainly not going to happen overnight. To accomplish this, we need the help of each Rotarian in our District. We need to change the culture of our membership and reach across to the younger generation with empathy. Rotaract and Interact are the future of our district, these young people, god willing, will be the next generation of Rotarians. They will bring a different Rotary, the same as we have brought a different Rotary from our generation. Interact and Rotaract stand on the shoulders of diversity and equality on tips of toes looking past the horizon to a new future of Rotary.

To see this future come to past we must do everything we can to help these younger people. We need to make Rotaract and Interact a priority in our district. There should be a class at PETS dedicated to Rotaract and Interact, I think a full day on starting a clubs and why it is important is called for but realistically at least an hour. New presidents should be taught the value of these clubs and why they can make a difference in our communities and our district. It should be a goal of each club to sponsor an Interact club and a Rotaract club, especially now when they are looking for opportunities

to help. These good people, in the face of pandemic want to make a difference. We just need to give them an opportunity. So when you get an email from me asking what can you do to help start a club, don't just delete the message but think about your opportunity to make a real difference in a younger person's life. You can give to foundation, help stop polio, build a playground but I can tell you, nothing will give you greater pleasure than helping the next generation find their footing.

As a district we will be doing much more work with teens and young adults. As such we will need a comprehensive district policy for Youth Protection. Over the last few months these policies have been worked on and reviewed and worked on further. It is our goal that District Governor Joe Kashi will sign off on a district Youth Protection Policy this Rotary year. We were very close to a policy until November when RI put out their new policy and we need to be in step with it. Each club will have a meeting going over Youth Protection as agreed upon last year at District Conference.

Winter brings long hours of twilight and cold. The sun rises so low on the horizon, golden sunlight casts long cold shadows and wind rips at your cheeks. The air smells like dry metal and you feel more than hear the crunch of snow underfoot as winter seems to quiet all sound. Spring will come again and with it that feeling of youth and renewal. The sun will rise higher and with it our spirits. We will have opportunity.

I am excited to see just how much we can do together. This year has been difficult. Perhaps most difficult for those students and younger people who have never felt such distress or hardship in their lives. They want to help, they want to be of service,

they want to make a difference, they just need a little help from you. We are going to change the world this next year, let's make it a change for the good!