Nina Kolenc
Maribor, Slovenia

As a member of the Rotaract club, a Rotary-sponsored service club for young men and women ages 18 to 30, Nina Kolenc a high school teacher in Maribor, Slovenia, helped initiate a project which, in turn, influenced similar projects in many countries across numbers of continents. Rotaract Slovenia decided to make a small humanitarian project: donating blood to local hospitals. Nina said

> *"We wanted to take a small step towards a big difference."*

Nina says that Rotaract was not well known program in her coutry among Rotarians and she felt that through this project they could all do something together...its simple, so everyone can do it. It turned out later to be without borders, quickly moving from local to global.

The project has been very successful. It was initially planned to take place during a single week but that was extended the first year. Not long after, a blood drive was organized in Sao Paulo, Brazil. Soon the Rotaract Club of Mella, Ethiopia, organized a Blood Drive. The most recent count showed that the idea has spread to many countries over five continents, Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe and South America. This project has united more than 1000 members of Rotary International and their friends as blood donors.

Through this simple beginning, blood is being donated in Brazil, Egypt, Ethiopia, Hungary, Nepal, Samoa, Slovenia, Ukraine, Tanzania, Turkey, Uruguay and spreading each year.

Nina says that the idea came from a personal experience. Eight years ago when she was 21, her heart stopped suddenly due to fibrillation that caused cardiac arrest. No blood could be pumped to her body. She was declared clinically dead. She recovered but she says that:

"I did not forget that life is short and that humans are mortal. For me, the life blood is the symbol. When someone donates blood he or she is giving life to someone else and helping the blood to circulate."

Today Nina is healthy thanks to those blood donations and is a physical education teacher. She has finished the Faculty of sports, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia, and is currently working on her master thesis (Faculty of social sciences, also at the University of Ljubljana).

The blood drive, with Nina as a primary driver behind it, continues in its 4th year primarily in Rotarian family clubs in Slovenia. Nine has long been a wonderful role model for other young

people especially those in Rotaract. With her bright smile, she is a living example of how blood donations save lives.