

The Rotary Club of Nelson Bay



(Incorporated in New South Wales)

District 9670, New South Wales, Australia
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Report from the Rotary Youth Exchange Program Review Committee

Committee: PP Peter McBean (Chairman)
PDG Don Whatham
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Committee Brief: To review the existing Rotary Youth Exchange Program and make recommendations to make the program more acceptable to stakeholders in this 21st century.

Preamble: The committee met on three occasions when active and construction debate resulted in this report being submitted to the members of the Rotary Club of Nelson Bay Inc for their consideration and acceptance. If that be in the affirmative then the committee will modify the report minimally for submission to the Youth Exchange Committee of Rotary District 9670.

The Rotary Youth Exchange Program is a program of Rotary International and has operated throughout the Rotary world since its inception in the mid 1900's. The program aims to establish world peace through world understanding by having youth experience the culture and history of other nations and peoples.

From the beginning the program was well accepted and enthusiastically implemented by Rotary Clubs and Rotarians across the globe bringing a lifetime experience to young people from many nations. Many of those exchange students still correspond and/or visit their host parents cementing the firm relationships established during their exchange.

However, over the years the number of Rotary Clubs participating in the program has dropped appreciably bringing many Rotarians to question the relevance of the program to today's world and in particular to the youth of today.

In Rotary District 9670 only 15 clubs out of 52 are participating in the program in 2009 which equates to 28% and we understand that that trend is exhibited world wide. Why is this so? Well, simply, we live in a very different world today than we did even ten (10) years ago – different values, different social issues, different freedoms and different expectations. The program has not changed or been modified to meet these changes and therefore many Rotarians see it as being irrelevant and no longer meeting the original program aims.

The committee focused on being entirely objective and unbiased in its deliberations and assessment of the situation and relentlessly sought to find solutions to the problem we identified. Some of those problems were enunciated by our own members in their submissions to the committee and the committee wishes to express its appreciation of that support and cooperation.

Program Benefits:

Even though we sought a copy of the official program documentation from the District Youth Exchange Committee and have not received same, this committee has identified the following as the key positive attributes of the current program –

- Program has served Rotary well over many years
- Has been of benefit to both inbound and outbound students
- Has greatly assisted in promoting world peace and understanding
- Has benefited individual Rotary Clubs and Rotarians

Program Problems:

Likewise, this committee has identified, with the assistance of members of the Rotary Club of Nelson Bay the following as the program's major problems at this time –

- Program has remained basically unchanged since its inception and therefore is no longer relevant to the 21st century society
- Poor selection process in the northern hemisphere tends to produce more problem students with a lack of understanding of the program
- Program processes overseas tend to favour students from well to do backgrounds whereas students from poor backgrounds would benefit more from the experience
- Lack of program understanding and the need for students to bond with other exchange students tends to negate their exposure to the culture and customs of the host country
- Selection process should restrict students to under 18 years. This would promote a better appreciation of the education benefits and assimilation into the local society
- Lack of language skills tends to create barriers in forging friendships with school peer groups
- Ease of communications with other exchange students, parents and friends at home
- Restrictions the Rotary program places on students are unacceptable to 2009 students
- Aging Rotary membership tends to inhibit hosting
- Because of past problems there is a lack of commitment by Rotarians to host
- Lack of suitable aged children in possible hosting families
- Inability to commit to extended time period – perhaps exchange is too long
- Selection standards not uniform across participating countries
- Poor briefing by Rotary of inbound students to Australia
- Isolation in country districts tends to make assimilation difficult
- Better counselling required for host parents and students

Further possible reasons for these problems:

1. The youth of today are more mature and worldly because of better education, more immediate information on world events, better communication systems, etc.
2. They are more independent and exercise their rights regardless of the responsibilities or consequences.
3. They have the opportunity to travel the world irrespective of youth exchange programs.
4. Rotary Clubs and Rotarians are restricted by local Federal and State laws which frustrate those willing to host.
5. Rotarians feel they are beyond taking on the responsibility of an exchange student and the legal ramifications that entails.
6. The non-uniformity of the program throughout the Rotary world, viz selection processes differ, student standards differ, national cultures and behavioural standards vary.
7. In Australia eligibility for the program is the student must have completed their secondary education Year 12 and therefore use the exchange year as a gap year experience. Overseas, the majority of students have not yet completed the equivalent of Year 12 and will enter that final stage upon their return home after the exchange. In both instances there is reduced incentive to attend school whilst on the exchange.

Recommended Solutions:

Problem(s)

- Poor selection process in the northern hemisphere tends to produce more problem students with a lack of understanding of the program
- Program processes overseas tend to favour students from well to do backgrounds whereas students from poor backgrounds would benefit more from the experience

Recommended Solution

- ▶ Rotary International to ensure the implementation of the stringent selection standards set down for all participating countries including Australia
- ▶ Interviewing panels to be more searching for suitable and appropriate candidates
- ▶ Individual interviewers to consider countries for which candidates are most suitable

Problem(s)

- Aging Rotary membership tends to inhibit hosting
- Because of past problems there is a lack of commitment by Rotarians to host
- Lack of suitable aged children in possible hosting families

Recommended Solution

- ▶ Hosting to be open to families outside the Rotary Club. Host parents should be parents of school students in the same peer group as the exchange student

Problem(s)

- Ease of communications with other exchange students, parents and friends at home
- Restrictions the Rotary program places on students are unacceptable to 2009 students

Recommended Solution(s)

- ▶ Contact with other exchange students should be limited to specific functions, supervised by Rotarians, the Safari and the District Conference. This exposure should apply to all Districts, metro and country
- ▶ Ease of communication with native country be restricted, this includes use of mobile phones

Problem

- Lack of language skills tends to create barriers in forging friendships with school peer groups

Recommended Solution

- ▶ Immediately after selection the sponsoring Rotary Club should implement a language training program so that the student has the basic language skills upon arrival on the host country

Problem

- Restrictions the Rotary program places on students are unacceptable to 2009 students

Recommended Solution

- ▶ Behaviour acceptable to Australian students should be acceptable for inbound students

Problem

- Inability to commit to extended time period – perhaps exchange is too long

Recommended Solution

- ▶ Period of exchange should be six (6) months and the student can apply for a six (6) month extension or transfer to another Rotary program yet to be approved

Problem

- Program has remained basically unchanged since its inception and therefore is no longer relevant to the 21st century society

Recommended Solution

- ▶ Replace the existing Youth Exchange Program with a program more in tune with today and young people as well as Rotarians. The suggestion is for a Working Holiday Program already in existing on an international level.

The Replacement Program:

Working Holidays

Rotary International summarises the Youth Exchange Program on its web site as follows:

you'll learn a new way of living, a great deal about yourself, and maybe even a new language. You'll also be an ambassador, teaching people you meet about your country, culture, and ideas. You can help bring the world closer – and make some good friends in the process.

In increasing numbers adolescents and young adults have been doing this on their own – without the help of Rotary – over the past fifteen to twenty years, using their “gap” year travelling the world.

One of the popular means of getting to know another country is the “Working Holiday”. A number of countries have arranged reciprocal visa classes to make it possible for young adults (18 – 30 years of age) to travel, work and study in their countries for a period of up to 12 months. Our suggested scheme is based on this visa class.

Working Holiday Visa (WHV) – how it works:

The countries participating in the Working Holiday Visa scheme are:

Belgium	Germany	Malta
Canada	Hong Kong	Netherlands
Cyprus, Republic of	Ireland, Republic of	Norway
Denmark	Italy	Sweden
Estonia	Japan	Taiwan
Finland	Korea	United Kingdom
France		

Young people from Chile, Thailand, Turkey and the USA can also get similar visa but under slightly different conditions.

In Australia holders of this Working Holiday visa (Sub Class 417) are allowed to study for up to four months and to work as much as they want – limited to 6 months with one employer. There are no limitations regarding the kind of employment although working in specified (agricultural) industries in regional Australia may earn them points for a second WHV – as the WHV is basically a “once in a lifetime” opportunity.

They are – under the WHV conditions - considered “residents for tax purposes” when they apply for a Tax File Number and stay longer than six months. Any “super” accrued while working can be claimed after leaving the country. WHV holders have no social security (Centrelink) entitlements but can have a Medicare “visitors” cover when they are from a country with which Australia has reciprocal social security arrangements (UK, Malta, Finland, Sweden, Norway, Netherlands, Italy). In other cases the student has to arrange his own health cover.

The student must have access to sufficient funds to support him or herself for the initial stage of the holiday. Generally, AUD\$ 5,000 may be regarded as sufficient, but the amount may vary depending on the length of stay and the extent of planned travel. He/she should also have a return or onward ticket or the funds for a fare to depart Australia. The student may be asked to provide evidence. Evidence may include a certified copy of a bank statement and an air ticket out of Australia.

There are some health and character requirements – similar to those for the YEP students – and the student has to sign a declaration that he/she will respect Australian values and the laws of the land. Additional health checks may be required when the students wishes to work in the health care sector or with children.

The cost of the visa for overseas visitors is \$195.00. Applications can be made “on line”. In the financial year 2006-2007 over 130,000 WHV’s were granted and the next year almost 150,000.

In most participating countries there are several agencies that make it their business to support working holiday makers by arranging – cheap – air fares and some guidance during the first days in Australia (getting a TFN, opening a bank account, providing lodging in hostels) before they get “on their way”.

What can Rotary do within this framework?

Without hosting commitments or any legal responsibility for “inbound” students on an ongoing basis, local Rotary clubs could be involved in coaching and mentoring WHV-students and helping them to find work. Rotary could also offer an opportunity to bring the student in closer contact with local people and culture.

In more detail:

Select students.

When Rotary is prepared to “lend a hand” to students it should be allowed to select the students of which they can expect that they have sufficient commitment to make more of their year than “one big party”. Selection criteria should be further developed but will not be too different from the ones in place except for recognising the fact that all participants will be “adults”.

Help “outbound” students prepare for their trip.

Rotary in “inbound” countries could prepare practical information (if only references to web sites) for potential students and make this information available to Rotary in “outbound” countries to help applicants prepare themselves. They could also organise meetings between “outbounds” and students that have returned from the chosen destination. Students should prepare a brief presentation about themselves, their “home” club and country for use while overseas and visiting Rotary Clubs and be prepared to make a presentation to their “home” club about their trip overseas after they return.

Help “inbound” students on their way.

Each inbound student could be assigned a local Rotary Club that is prepared to help the student on his or her way shortly after arrival in the country:

- Providing board and lodging for up to five days
- Help organise a bank account and TFN and (Medicare Card)
- Help get transport (buying a car, getting travel passes and the like)
- Give some background information about possible destinations

- Provide or help to arrange a mail forwarding facility and reference address
- Explain about work practices, labour relations and what to expect when starting in a job. (For instance point out that a RSA certificate will increase their employability in the hospitality industry where many WHV students find work)

Help travelling “inbounds” while on their way.

The whole idea is that students should travel the country and while travelling try to earn enough money to support themselves. So contrary to the current YEP the “inbound” will - or should - not stay in one place for long . The student should be provided with a directory of participating Rotary Clubs and contact numbers. When visiting an area and in need of help the “inbound” can:

- Call on the local club for local information
- Enquire about job opportunities
- If a relatively “long term” job is available get some help by finding suitable board and lodging (there should be no obligation for Rotarians to host but voluntary hosting – preferably at cost for the student – can be part of the arrangement). Be invited to local social (Rotary) activities and/or by individual Rotarians and make a presentation about themselves and where they are from
- Get support from the local club in case of problems (health, legal or otherwise) and in case of an emergency where immediate return to the home country is indicated.

Other points.

With a bit of brainstorming the program opportunities, its rules and its limitations should be fleshed out considerably.

Some Advantages.

Above the scheme is described mainly from the Australian – inbound – point of view. However, all arrangements can be made reciprocal with young Australians travelling to Europe and other countries. The advantage would be that Australians would no longer be limited to one country but will be able to travel the whole of Europe – although without work rights in some countries, like Switzerland, Austria and Spain.

As applicants can be as old as 29, some of the older applicants will have already finished their education and gained some work experience. It is not unusual to find “specialists” amongst the WHV holders (IT, printing, construction) while there are special arrangements for qualified nurses to be employed in the health care sector.

Some Drawbacks.

With travelling students there will be less of a personal relationship developing. Also some regions will be more attractive for travellers than others with a higher demand for support on clubs on the Gold Coast than in Longreach and Nelson Bay compared to Dubbo.

With students travelling the whole of Australia and Europe instead of staying within one Rotary District more coordination will be required. In this day and age of internet and computers this should not be a problem.

Not all countries that have a reciprocal agreement with Australia have similar agreements with all other countries. In the European Union “exchange” is no problem as young adults can freely travel and settle within the union. Inbound students from Australia that want to travel would have to apply for visas for each participating country separately. Working rights may differ slightly between countries, but according to the various immigration department web sites are all pretty similar. Germany and the Netherlands have similar arrangements with Japan, New Zealand and Canada. Although the scheme will be more or less limited to the countries with a Working Holiday Visa facility but with some research probably similar arrangements for a stay up to a year can be found in other countries as well. And with Rotarians world wide we may be able to persuade governments to participate in the reciprocal scheme.

Summary.

With the scheme outlined above, young adults will be supported in *learning a new way of living* – most likely with more variety than under the old scheme. They’ll certainly have to *learn a great deal more about themselves* and *a new language* as they will be in a less sheltered environment. They will be offered plenty of opportunities to be an *ambassador for their country* – just like under the old scheme - and will certainly *help bring the world closer*. *Making good friends* in the process is also pretty certain but – in the end – it is up to them.

There will be less demand on the few individual Rotarians or others for long term hosting and less responsibility for Rotary or individual Rotarians for student behaviour. Students will have none of the existing – outdated - restrictions (driving a car, drinking alcohol or having amorous relations).

The scheme will probably be less emotive as the current program, lacking “host mums and dads” and will need over all a slightly more business like approach providing services and information without accepting ongoing responsibilities. But, we are sure that with the Rotary attitude of creating fun out of service above self we’ll be able to make this as rewarding as the old program.

Rationale:

1. The committee realises the enormity of the task before it and the difficulty involved in recommending practical solutions to the program shortcomings which would satisfy all stakeholders and participants. With this in mind the committee, in recommending the above, appreciates that not all solutions are implementable or perhaps feasible, but sees them as being necessary to bring uniformity to the program
2. The process of achieving any change to a Rotary International approved program will be long and laborious with a path through a club, district, zone, region and then RI Evanston. However, nothing will change unless initially a Rotarian in a particular club deems it worthy of the effort to bring about change where change is warranted.
3. The committee could have decided that the existing program was totally unsatisfactory for this day and age and recommended a replacement without any protracted debate. However, that would have left the Rotary Youth Exchange Program in the same state it is at present. This was not the purpose of this committee.
4. The committee decided that once it identified the inherent problems it was logical that it then attempt to formulate a solution which both addressed that problem and would modify the program to suit today’s circumstances

5. The committee looked for solutions which would make the program more acceptable to Australian Rotary Clubs and Rotarians and at the same time to international clubs
6. Committee members are cognisant that their recommended solutions could and perhaps will be amended by either the Board or members of the Rotary Club of Nelson Bay prior to this proposal travelling further.

Conclusion:

This report is submitted to the Board of the Rotary Club of Nelson Bay Inc for its consideration and approval for (1) presentation to the members of the Rotary Club of Nelson Bay Inc and (2) submission to the District Governor of Rotary District 9670 as a catalyst for change.

PP Peter A. McBean

Chairman

Rotary Youth Exchange Program

Review Committee Report

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