

## Rotary and Youth

As leaders in their communities, the world's 1.2 million Rotarians are committed to helping young people prepare for the future. Rotary clubs support a variety of youth-oriented service projects and programs that include mentoring, tutoring, leadership development, vocational training, local and international scholarships, and urban peace initiatives. The Rotary Foundation recently launched a Children's Initiative allocating US\$20 million for child-focused literacy, shelter, poverty and hunger, health, drug- and child-abuse prevention projects.

### **A long-standing commitment to youth**

In 1919, just 14 years after Rotary began, Rotarians in Ohio established the Ohio Society for Crippled Children - the forerunner of the National Easter Seal Society. Rotary clubs in the 1920s, concerned about underage boys working long hours in sweatshops launched "boy conservation" programs. One such project, developed by the Rotary Club of Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, USA, was adopted city-wide. In 1923, with funds raised from Rotarians around the world, Rotarians in Japan responded to a devastating earthquake by building a home for orphans left homeless.

Throughout the years, service to youth has been a major focus of Rotary club projects. In 1949, the slogan "Every Rotarian an Example to Youth" was adopted by the Rotary International Board of Directors as an expression of commitment to children and youth.

### **Opportunities for education**

The Rotary Foundation of Rotary International is the largest source of privately-funded international scholarships. Each year, some 1,300 primarily young adults study at a college or university in another land. While abroad, Rotary scholars serve as youth ambassadors. For example, a scholar from Wyoming, USA while studying art in Chile worked with developmentally disabled children to create a 60 foot mural. A scholar from South Africa worked with adolescents from troubled homes at a Connecticut, USA psychiatric hospital.

Each year, some 7,000 secondary school students between the ages of 15-19 visit or study in another country through Rotary's youth exchange program. Youth exchange students live in Rotarian's homes and experience first-hand life, culture, and education in another country to promote international understanding among young people.

Clubs also equip young people with the tools they need to learn. Primary school students in Klana, Croatia are learning computer technology with computers provided by Rotarians in their country and Florida, USA. The children, many of whom are Bosnian refugees, are using the computers to learn English, complete math, science and history lessons, create artwork, and read books. In Bolivia, the Rotary Club of Cochabamba Norte built three libraries in low-income neighborhoods to increase literacy and reading skills. Through Rotary's World Community Service program, Rotarians are linked with needy schools and often supply textbooks, desks, and other resources.

## **Youth and health**

Rotary clubs, working on their own, or with Rotary Foundation grants, help provide basic health care for young people. Rotarians in Honduras used a US\$150,000 Rotary Foundation grant to establish a center where working and abandoned children up to age 16 receive primary health care and health education, attend educational programs and arts and crafts classes, and meet with peer mentors for personal support.

In Guatemala, a Rotary Foundation 3-H grant is teaching women about health and nutrition for themselves and their newborn babies. The program also provides nutritional supplements for the infants. To encourage more medical students to pursue pediatrics, the Rotary Club of Newmarket, New Zealand is funding three internships in the field. In Colombia, where some 40,000 children are homeless, Rotarians from four countries -- Colombia, Germany, England, and France -- sponsor medical treatment for street children who are often the victims of violence. The project includes setting up medical clinics within to treat malnutrition, respiratory infections, gunshot and knife wounds and other injuries.

Through the Rotary Foundation's PolioPlus program and global eradication efforts, more than one billion children worldwide have been immunized against polio since 1985. By the year 2005 Rotarian contributions will reach a half billion US dollars to eradicate the crippling disease. UNICEF estimates that there are two to three million children walking normally today who would have contracted polio were it not for the immunization efforts of the past 10 years.

## **Building future leaders**

Several Rotary programs help youth continue Rotary's tradition of community service and leadership. Interact (for high school students) and Rotaract (for young adults 18-30 years old) are Rotary-sponsored service clubs for young people. The clubs provide opportunities for leadership development, fellowship, and service.

Many Rotaract and Interact service projects focus on issues facing young people such as AIDS, the environment, homelessness, urban peace, and drug abuse prevention. British and Irish Rotaractors refurbished an orphanage in Romania, repairing broken doors and windows and painting walls. Interact clubs in Kuala Lumpur initiated a Drug and Alcohol Abuse awareness campaign, distributing educational materials to classmates and organizing group discussions on ways to curb substance abuse.

Through Rotary Youth Leadership Awards (RYLA), Rotary districts and clubs invite young people ages 14-30 to participate in workshops that focus on leadership and professional development. Sessions are tailored to participants' interests and age group.

## **Promoting peace among youth**

Young people are the most common victims of violence. Rotary projects around the world work to prevent violence by addressing urban/youth issues such as homelessness, joblessness, drug abuse, and lack of positive role models.

In Sydney, Australia homeless youths, many of whom have left home to escape violence, often resort to drug abuse and crime to support themselves. The "Street Smart" center, established by Rotarians, works to reunite them with families and provides health care, drug abuse treatment, and counseling, and vocational training to incorporate them back into society. The Rotary Club of Columbia Northwest, Missouri, USA established a long-term peer mediation program in local schools to teach children how to resolve conflicts in nonviolent ways. Irish Rotarians help coordinate "Friends Forever," a program that builds bridges of peace between Protestant and Catholic teenagers in Northern Ireland. The Rotary Club of Los Angeles adopted a gang-infested area of East Los Angeles. In partnership with the Sheriff's Department, an activity center has been built for youth and is the base for neighborhood community services offering educational programs and after school tutoring.