

North Star Youth Exchange: Myth Busters!

By Vicki Dilley

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Rotary International President Klingensmith has on his website: *“Rotary is the best in the world at linking people of goodwill around the globe and then gaining their cooperation and support to make the world a much better place to live and work.”*

Rotary Youth Exchange fits perfectly into this vision and it is time that we get behind its growth and development just like we have done with our efforts and determination to eradicate polio. It is the youth that is our future...future to be Rotary members, future to be the agents of change for a better world. President Klingensmith also has said that he wants to build a bigger, better, bolder Rotary and again I believe it is time we do that with all the gusto we can.

I so enjoy speaking to club Youth Exchange Officers, to Country Officers and encouraging them to take on a new zeal for youth exchange. Over two years ago I spoke to the YE board about what some of the pitfalls I see in our efforts to grow. I would like us to look at those again and make sure we are not continuing to walk into the same holes and perpetuating myths. I think if we dispel the myths we are going to see growth.

In years past (10 years ago?) we saw numbers of over 100 students from North Star going on exchange. In 2009-10 we had about 45, this year we have about 65, next year I hope to see another 30% growth and increase our numbers to 85 students. I would like to think that we can be a part of the worldwide growth of Rotary International. For years we were told that the average was 8,000 exchanges per year and now we are told that this last year it had fallen to 6,400. I was personally very disappointed when I heard this.

We must always know WHY we do RYE, we must believe that it is a big part of our Rotary International goals and beliefs. If we don't and we continue to perpetuate the myths, that so seriously need to be challenged, we will continue to dwindle and we will only see this as a lot of hard work. When a heavy engine first gets started moving it starts very slowly, but once it has its momentum it seems to fly down the tracks with little effort. I hope we get to the point we are flying down the tracks with record speed.

Some of the myths that I think are perpetuated:

Myth Busting!

~Clubs can't afford to do Youth Exchange

Club membership increases because of Youth Exchange new energy comes into the club bringing new ideas, new areas of expertise which brings financial growth. Without, the club can stagnate.

~Clubs can't find host families

This is absolute fact when you believe it. Your attitude, your communication, your ability to "see" host families will insure that there are no host families available. Host families are all over and when you start seeing them, you will be amazed at how easy it is to get them involved. Check your attitude and the way you communicate...

Sub-Myth: Host families have to be Rotarians: No way, this is the beauty of it all; anyone qualified can be a host family whether they are a Rotarian or not. It is a great way to recruit future Rotarians!

~The schools don't want to be involved in Youth Exchange

Not everyone's experience...have your school principal or superintendent talk to another towns school leaders that embraces this as a wonderful part of their education program. They will tell you that they are disappointed that each school is capped at 5 Rotary students per year.

~Students are not interested in Youth Exchange

Get a Rotex student to come to talk to your schools student body...share the success stories. Don't get stuck on the 1% that did not work out perfectly. We have a gold mine of stories with our Rotex and we should be sharing their stories...talk about changed lives, Mn/ Wi students that became world citizens and are intensely interested in World Peace and Understanding!

~Families can't afford to do RYE, we are in a tough economy

How much does it cost to keep your student at home? Gas, car insurance, food, entertainment, education, etc...I would suggest that you will save money sending a student abroad. How do measure what they gain from the experience? Perhaps because of their year abroad they will test out of a language, receive college credit for their time, receive a scholarship or grant because of their uniqueness to the institution or even be lead into a job or passion because of this year's development in their life. Priceless.

~There are other myths beyond just the ones listed above; these are just the ones we hear most often. It is time to do some myth busting and really get behind this worthwhile program!