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## ROLE & CONTRIBUTION OF ROTARY YOUTH LEADERSHIP AWARDS (RYLA) IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIETY

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### Abstract:

The Rotary Youth Leadership Awards (RYLA) is a Rotary-sponsored youth leadership training program designed for high school students. Each year, more than 9,000 young people participate in RYLA programs sponsored by Rotary clubs across over 25 countries. The program is provided free of charge to all participating students. One notable RYLA program takes place at Bradford Woods, owned and operated by Indiana University, where participants engage in outdoor leadership training facilitated by trained professionals. The program emphasizes experiential learning through various outdoor challenges, fostering self-confidence, teamwork, and leadership skills. This research paper explores RYLA's history, objectives, structure, impact, and related Rotary youth programs, including Early Act, Rotaract, and Interact clubs.

**Keywords:** Rotary, Clubs, Leadership, Awards, Skills, Training Program

### Introduction:

RYLA is Rotary South East's leadership development program for young people aged 14-17. Since its inception in 2000, Rotary clubs have offered young individuals the opportunity to participate in this unique experience. RYLA is designed to develop leadership skills, promote teamwork, and instill a sense of civic responsibility. The program originated in 1976 when Floyd Harriman, then district governor of the Rotary Club of Pleasanton, tasked a committee with establishing a Rotary Youth Leadership Award Seminar. The first RYLA event took place on May 14-16, 1976, with 55 high school students in attendance at Trinity University. Since then, RYLA has grown into an internationally recognized leadership training program that selects outstanding high school students to participate in leadership seminars organized by Rotary clubs worldwide.

### Rotary Youth Leadership Award (RYLA) History:

Rotary Youth Leadership Awards (RYLA) is Rotary's leadership training program for young people to further develop character and leadership skills and learn about Rotary. RYLA



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participants can be ages 14-30, but most clubs and districts choose to focus on a narrower age range, such as 14-18 or 19-30. Though there are many variations for RYLA programs, District 3131's RYLA works with students the June after their sophomore year in high school. RYLA emphasizes leadership, citizenship, personal growth, service and aims to demonstrate Rotary's respect and concern for youth; provide an effective training experience for selected youth and potential leaders; encourage leadership of youth by youth; recognize publicly young people who are rendering service to their communities.

Originating in 1959 in Queensland, Australia, RYLA was created as a festival highlighting local youth organized in honor of a royal visit by Princess Victoria. Through Rotarians' constant belief in the potential of youth, RYLA has since become an opportunity to help the next generation of leaders define themselves and expand their skills. Officially adopted by Rotary International (RI) in 1971, this exciting program engages Rotary clubs and districts around the world. Here in District 3131 we believe that RYLA will assist young people to realize their potential and to adapt to experiences within their life and their communities. RYLA enables participants to join other young people from across our District. Students come together to exchange ideas, plans and opinions with other talented and energetic people like yourself in a supportive atmosphere, free from pressure and distraction.

The support and interest of individual clubs is a critical element in planning a successful RYLA at any level. Rotary clubs make RYLA happen. Clubs are responsible for selecting participants and funding their attendance. In general, clubs are the primary contact point for most youth participants throughout their RYLA experience. For these students, this recognition offers the opportunity to build self-confidence, gain exposure to a variety of issues and people, meet active community leaders, and learn valuable information and career skills. RYLA gives Rotarians the opportunity to mentor promising young leaders serving their own communities and beyond. Rotarians serve as resources for participants on the path to becoming professional and community leaders. In turn, RYLA can bring new energy to a Rotary district, inspire ideas for service, increase support of community service projects, and develop future Rotarians.

The length of District 3131's RYLA is four days and is hosted by District 3131. In recent years, it has taken the form of a camp that lasts from Sunday to Wednesday. It was originally held in different locations but since 1998 it has been held at Camp Hinds in Raymond Maine from Sunday to Wednesday at the end of June. The date varies as it depends on when the students get out of school. Clubs throughout District 3131 have sent up to 120 high school students RYLA at Camp Hinds in Raymond Maine. The Rotary Club of Scarborough has been a very avid supporter of this program. Each year they have been sending more students than any other club in the district. After registration early Sunday morning, participants will be assigned to a Leadership Exploration Group (LEG) with 11 others where they will spend 4 days together exploring leadership concepts through a series of practical situations. These include team building activities, group problem solving, confidence building and solo events.

Each LEG is guided through the conference by a team of experienced facilitators who have been selected by the District Chair because of their demonstrated leadership ability, commitment to the development of youth leaders, and experience with the RYLA program. Originally all LEG facilitators were experienced Rotarians from District 3131. In 1998, Marie Williams was the first District Governor to be a LEG facilitator. They had junior facilitators who



were RYLA graduates who assisted the Rotarian Facilitators. In recent years they are using more and more RYLA graduates as the facilitators of the LEGS. Several governors after Marie have participated in the entire event. The attendees have signed their names to a huge sheet with the year of the RYLA and each year they are hung up along with the prior years. Marie Williams saw the sheet from 1998 when she went back in 2007 for the final days activities. Most governors attend the final day with the parents as this is when the attendees tell about their experience.

### **What is RYLA :**

Rotary Youth Leadership Awards is an intensive leadership experience organized by Rotary clubs and districts where young people can develop leadership skills while having fun and making connections. RYLA's focus is on assisting young people to develop their abilities as leaders and to encourage them to reach their full potential.

#### **Core Curriculum and Objectives:**

In 1996, the Rotary International (RI) Board of Directors established the following core curriculum standards for all RYLA programs:

- Fundamentals of leadership
- Ethics of positive leadership
- Importance of communication skills in effective leadership
- Problem-solving and conflict management
- Understanding Rotary's role in local and global communities
- Building self-confidence and self-esteem
- Promoting community and global citizenship

### **The key objectives of RYLA are:**

1. Encouraging and training youth leaders in responsible and effective leadership.
2. Promoting youth leadership among peers and in the broader community.
3. Recognizing young individuals for their contributions to society.
4. Demonstrating Rotary's dedication to youth development.

### **Rotary Youth Leadership Award (RYLA) Levels:**

1. Club-Level- Club President will appoint a RYLA committee
2. Zonal RYLA-Synergy RYLA of Clubs in the Zone
3. District Level- DG Appoints a District RYLA Chair to communicate and promote RYLA to the clubs and to oversee a District committee that organizes District level RYLA
4. Multidistrict Level (Domestic & International) - Program is Organized by District involving other Districts

### **Rotary Youth Leadership Award (RYLA) Types:**

1. Women, Farmers & Youth Empowerment.
2. For Girls School Level.
3. Special RYLA for children with Special Needs. (Deaf & Mute, Blind, Physically Handicapped and Mentally Challenged etc.)



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4. Cultural, Vocational and Adventure.

### Program Structure

RYLA programs are structured as single-day events, weekend retreats, or weeklong camps, depending on the hosting Rotary district. At locations such as Bradford Woods, participants engage in a range of activities, including:

- **Outdoor Challenge Education Program:** A mix of ground-based and high-altitude activities that require teamwork, critical thinking, and problem-solving.
- **Leadership Workshops:** Interactive sessions on ethical leadership, communication, and project management.
- **Team-Building Exercises:** Group activities designed to build trust, cooperation, and resilience.
- **Service Projects:** Hands-on community engagement projects that apply learned leadership skills in real-world settings.
- **Guest Speakers and Panels:** Talks by Rotary members and industry professionals that provide mentorship and inspiration.

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### Impact and Outcomes:

RYLA's effectiveness is evident in its long-term impact on participants, who report:

- Enhanced leadership and communication skills.
- Increased involvement in community service initiatives.
- Stronger self-confidence and problem-solving abilities.
- Expanded professional and social networks.
- Greater appreciation for civic responsibility and teamwork.

Many RYLA alumni continue their engagement with Rotary through Early Act, Rotaract, and Interact clubs, further solidifying their commitment to community service and leadership development.

### Rotary Youth Programs

**Early Act:** Established in 2005, Early Act is a Rotary-sponsored club for elementary school students aged 5-13. The program promotes citizenship, ethical responsibility, and leadership. Early Act clubs focus on values such as caring, respect, empathy, and responsibility, encouraging young students to engage in community service and develop leadership skills at an early age.

**Rotaract Clubs:** Rotaract is a Rotary-sponsored service club for young adults aged 18-30. With over 8,400 clubs in 170 countries, Rotaract provides leadership and service opportunities, allowing members to participate in community projects, mentor younger Interact



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members, and collaborate with Rotary clubs worldwide.

**Interact Clubs:** Aimed at students aged 12-18, Interact clubs focus on community service and leadership development. With nearly 400,000 members across 14,911 clubs in 145 countries, Interact fosters international friendships and cultural exchange through hands-on service projects.

**Rotary Youth Exchange:** The Rotary Youth Exchange program enables students aged 15-19 to participate in international exchange programs, fostering cultural understanding and global citizenship. Over 8,000 students annually take part in this transformative experience, living with host families and attending school abroad.

**Rotary Youth Leadership Award (RYLA) Action Plan:**

1. RYLA-Making effective
2. Take Help from District
3. Get Feedback for Improvement
4. Report your Activities for recognition
5. Have interactions with parents
6. Every Rotary club will conduct Minimum 1 RYLA
7. RYLA month Celebration in December 2023
8. Feedback of RYLA from participants & Institutes
9. Recognition & Certificate of appreciation shall be given to the Club who performs Good in RYLA
10. Train the Trainers Seminar
11. District Youth Team will furnish list of RYLA topics covered in earlier District RYLAs
12. List of Speakers for RYLA

**Challenges and Future Directions**

Despite RYLA's success, challenges remain, including funding constraints, accessibility issues, and ensuring long-term engagement. Future enhancements should include:

- Expanding digital and hybrid leadership training modules.
- Strengthening mentorship and alumni networks for ongoing leadership development.
- Increasing outreach to underrepresented communities to promote inclusivity.

**Conclusion:**

The Rotary Youth Leadership Awards program is a cornerstone of Rotary International's commitment to youth leadership and community service. Through immersive training, mentorship, and hands-on service experiences, RYLA shapes young individuals into responsible, ethical leaders who contribute to their communities and beyond. By continuously evolving to meet modern challenges, RYLA remains a vital initiative in developing the leaders of tomorrow.

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