

OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH

by James Kennett, Southport

Madam Chairperson, Miss Kennedy,

Sir Robert Gordon Menzies was once quoted as having said "I have a respect for the rights of the top dog, and no use for the foolish doctrine of equality between the active and the idle, the intelligent and dull, the frugal and the improvident".

The qualities which distinguish those types, are qualities which can be instilled into a growing personality. The private sector through the many service clubs and organisations attempts to create an avenue for this learning. As a Rotarian I am naturally more familiar with the effort Rotary makes for the cause of Youth.

Rotary's slogan with regard to youth is "Every Rotarian an example to Youth". A Rotary Club's greatest opportunity in service to youth is: first, leadership to help the community realise that its duty and obligation is to its youth; second, to find out the needs of the youth of the community; and third, to see that those needs are supplied by the authority and agencies properly responsible.

Rotary has instigated and developed several major initiatives, some of which are well known and others which are better described as quiet achievers.

In the early 60's Rotary created the first Interact Club to operate as an autonomous group catering for people between the ages of fourteen and eighteen. Its goal was to recognise and develop constructive leadership and personal integrity; to encourage and practise thoughtfulness of and helpfulness to others; to create awareness of home and family; to build respect for the rights of others, based on the recognition of the worth of each individual; to emphasise acceptance of individual responsibility as the basis of personal success, community improvement, and group achievement; to recognise the dignity and value of all useful occupations as opportunities to serve society; to provide opportunities for gaining increased knowledge and understanding of community, national, and world affairs; and to open avenues of personal and group action leading to the advancement of international understanding and good will towards all people. Interact Clubs are sponsored by individual Rotary Clubs and are conventionally school oriented.

As a follow on to the success of the Interact Clubs, Rotary sponsored a plan for young adults known as Rotor Act. Rotor Act purpose is to develop leadership and responsible citizenship through service to the community, and to advance the cause of international understanding and peace, and to promote recognition and acceptance of high ethical standards as a leadership quality and vocational responsibility. All Rotor Act Clubs are also autonomous and whilst their age limits are eighteen to twenty-eight they should not be considered as junior Rotary Clubs, but rather as independent community service groups.

One of Rotary's better known projects for youth is its Youth Exchange Programme. Each year throughout the world, thousands of exchange students are sponsored by Rotary Clubs to spend a year studying in a foreign country. As a former exchange student, I can assure you there is no better educational opportunity than to discover the world at that age.

It is important to note that the selection of worthy exchanges are not restricted to sons and daughters of Rotarians, but come from the broad cross section of senior students. The Exchange Selection Committees main criteria of selection is

ambassadorship, as the crux of the programme is to further international understanding and goodwill.

More directly for the benefit of the community each Rotary District organises an annual Rotary Youth Leadership Award Camp. These RYLA Camps, as they are known, are a unique method of teaching leadership skills to the young community leaders and potential leaders. Young adults between the ages of eighteen to twenty-four who have not had the opportunity of gaining leadership skills through tertiary education or corporate management training and would ordinarily develop these skills through the school of hard knocks are encouraged to attend this one week live-in seminar where Rotary recognizes and rewards the high quality of the many young people who are offering their services to the community. As an awardee in 1976 and now as Chairman of the District RYLA Committee I have a first hand knowledge of just how successful these camps are. The spirit developed, as so many positive thinking young citizens discover more about themselves and others, creates an atmosphere that one can rarely find in any conventional educational environment.

To put the Camp in perspective my Rotary District extends from Southport, west to St. George and south to Grafton and from that large area we accepted seventy-seven nominations. These awardees upon arriving at the Camp, which this year was held at Camp Leslie Dam Warwick, select one of the following Committees: Social, Sports and Camp-fire, Administration, Daily Duties, Sergeant at Arms, and from thereon help to run the day to day activities of the Camp. Their involvement, in these Committees, gives them an immediate avenue to develop the skills they learn during the week.

When creating the Seminars the RYLA Committee looks to the top speakers in each field of Leadership Training for assistance on a voluntary basis with the result that a Seminar that would cost a private organisation many thousands of dollars, in Speakers fees alone, costs us only the price of accommodation.

Included in our list of guest speakers were, Australia's top Toastmaster and popular Brisbane Radio personality, Mr Russ Walkington, Queensland's General Manager of the Australian Institute of Management, Mr Ray Sadler, Mr Max Bond, A.M. who received his award for services to the Australian Army with regard to leadership training, Australia's foremost motivational speaker, Mr Paul Dunn, Brisbane news reader Mike Higgins, and T.V. public relations Manager, Gary Linaker, Director of The Relaxation Centre, Bert Wier, and Senior Insurance Manager, Fred Bol.

I'm sure when you hear the session titles you will realise just how effective this Seminar can be. They included Communication through Public Speaking, Listening with Your Ears, Are Leaders Born or Made, Non Verbal Communication, People and their Personalities, Time Management, Motivation and Success, Creative Thinking and Brain Storming, Organisation and Administration of a Club, Take the Chair, Media Theory and Practical, Personal Communication, and Stress and Self Management.

The benefits from a Seminar like this are obvious. The individual is a much more capable leader, those who he has an influence on are immediately affected, the community benefits in the long term and Rotary finds it, too, benefits as a growing number of awardees, like myself, are being asked to join Rotary Clubs.

However, the schemes and projects I have just mentioned work for those who are already heading in the right direction. I would doubt that the two speakers proceeding me have ever felt alienated nor can I recall the same feeling myself. The theme of this Conference states "The Alienated Generation" question mark.

I believe there is no alienated generation but rather a percentage of each generation who become the problem group.

The real challenge is to instil the desired qualities into this problem group and whilst that might appear as an insurmountable task I believe there is a solution and the 'kids' themselves are laying the clues.

Last year my Rotary Club approached a number of High Schools with several projects in mind, but it wasn't until we spoke to the young adults and the people who deal with them directly, that we discovered what real problems young people of today are facing and how our Club could assist them. The main problem was a general apathy to school work and the prospects of the future, especially in the last semester. It appeared they reached a peak at the beginning of the school year, full of dreams and hopes of the future, and tapered off drastically to a complete don't care attitude by the end of the year.

The essential problem was one relating to self motivation. To counter this problem we organised a motivational seminar. The venue was the Chevron Convention Centre on the Gold Coast. The audience, totalling nearly two thousand, was the senior students of the major High Schools on the coast. We flew Pop Entertainer, Normie Rowe in to act as Master of Ceremony. Motivational Speaker, Paul Dunn, delivered an address that had them cheering for more. Rev. A. C. Male, who is to address this conference tomorrow, directed his advice to the group in a manner that is uniquely his and most elaborate convention audio-visual equipment projected emotional productions on the theme of 'Australian National Pride'.

The theoretical cost of this day was over seventeen thousand dollars but, because every organisation we approached became enthused with our concept of encouraging and motivating our problem age group, the actual cost was less than six hundred dollars.

The feed back from the schools after this Seminar was extremely pleasing and we have had numerous requests to conduct what might best be described as booster sessions in the schools.

Most psychologists would agree that the reason 'kids' start hitting drugs and generally acting in an anti-social manner is to escape and the excuse we are given is that they are trying to find themselves. If you were to ask them what they mean, the best answer you'd receive would probably be a blank stare, and I wonder how many of you could define "finding yourself" off the cuff. Still, having been given the clue, all we need to use, is a little empathy.

The basic tools we have all used on the way to our successes have been: Communication, Initiative, Goalsetting, Positive Attitudes, an Open Mind, and a Vast Range of Experiences on which to draw as guide-lines.

The young people in this problem group have not had the opportunities to be put in situations which push them to the limit. It is not till they reach those situations that they will see how they treat and react with other people and how others see and treat them. They have not had the chance to discover their limitations and as a result have no idea of their capabilities. This lack of knowledge about themselves leads to a lack of confidence in themselves and their anti-social behaviour is generally their way of compensating. With this in mind I believe the solution is now obvious and that there are several creditable examples that we can follow.

Bro. Smith, who spoke yesterday, is a Director of a famous example in Boys Town. The Boy Scout and Girl Guide movements, along with the Police Citizens Youth Clubs and Y.M.C.A. have also discovered this solution.

The example I would like to specifically quote is that of the Outward Bound Foundation whose founder, the famous German educationalist Dr Kurt Hahn, who also founded Gordonstoun School summed up in that school's motto "There is more in you".

Outward Bound is a twenty-six day course designed specifically to help you discover yourself. It was created during the Second World War after the Merchant Seamen realised that the older seamen were surviving after their ships were torpedoed where the younger seamen were perishing. It was realised that the younger seamen, through their lack of experience, had not developed a self reliance. Dr Kurt Hahn was asked to solve the problem. He established a Seamanship based course and the results were immediate and successful. Since the War the Foundation has spread to many countries changing its format to suit the local environment.

Several years ago I attended an Outward Bound Course south of Cairns. After a few days of training in survival skills we trekked in mixed groups of twelve through some of the thickest jungle in the country. We rafted down wild mountain streams and avoided the natural hazards of snakes, stinging trees, cliffs and rapids.

Apart from the joys and frustrations that occurred throughout the course, three moments stay in my mind. The first was after a day of being totally lost in a most soul destroying jungle and bursting through the bush to find myself standing on a rock outcrop overlooking the beautiful Great Barrier Reef and its islands. The second was after spending three and a half days solo then meeting up with the group that I had grown so close to, and the third was when I climbed a 40 metre cliff face after almost conceding defeat to it. At that time I remember a line from Rudyard Kipling's poem "If". I quote: 'If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew to serve their turn long after they are gone and so hold on when there is nothing in you except the will which says to them — hold on'. It was not until that moment that I realized that you can exceed the limitations that you can put on yourself.

In summing up I suggest that we can best help the problem group by using the tools that are already proven to us and I believe there should be stronger development of adventure training in the outward bound style within the school systems.

If our youth could start with that sort of training, receive the further development offered by our Tertiary Institutions, Corporate Training, and Service Clubs, I'm sure we would have many more citizens with the qualities Sir Robert Gordon Menzies had in mind when he said, "I have a respect for the rights of the top dog, and no use for the foolish doctrine of equality between the active and idle, the intelligent and dull, the frugal and the improvident".

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