

Youth Exchange is a very different project from all others in Rotary. This is because all concerned with making an exchange happen are working together and this involves mutually international districts, whether or not the arrangement is reciprocal. It is important for Districts to appreciate that whatever they see happening at home is actually only half of the operation and that they should regard the relationships that are made with overseas colleagues as an indispensable part of the process.

Forming the relationships which enable this process to take place is complex. Everyone has access to the RI Youth Exchange Directory so can always attempt to contact someone from a particular part of a country. Apart from the fact that the information is unreliable there is no guarantee of having reached the right person or that there is no language barrier. There is no time to make a totally new acquaintance at that same time as effect an exchange. Personal contact has to happen in the first instance and a network of knowledge built up so that the DYEO can operate effectively.

The prime occasion for RIBI DYEOs to meet their counterparts is **at the EEMA Conference** (EEMA is an acronym for Europe, Eastern Mediterranean and Africa) which is one of the four largest regional Youth Exchange conferences held annually in the world. The event is actually more akin to an Assembly than a Conference because the very intensive programme consists of plenaries and workshops, with opportunities to network. EEMA is particularly well attended by delegates from all over the world and those who attend meet a considerable number of people in a very short space of time in a way that is altogether more meaningful than exchanging a business card. As one DYEO who attended EEMA wrote to his district when submitting his budget request for the following year:

I am already feeling the benefit of the networking opportunities and informative and relevant workshops and plenaries which I experienced at EEMA in September. Apart from the sharing of experience, personal contact with our exchange partners abroad is vital if we are to convince ourselves and wavering parents that Rotary can look after their child in a foreign country. It has altogether transformed the speed with which we can operate. We have met, we saw that we could trust each other and do business together and now this is happening. This could not have been done by skype or by email. These are used liberally during the exchange itself, not as an exploratory exercise. Personal contact has been a catalyst in assisting me to grow my programme.

The delegates to EEMA, all paid for by their districts, are the Chairs of the Multidistrict committees, the District Chairs and their Country specialists – those who deal with specific parts of the Rotary world to set up their exchanges.

IN RIBI where for years the programme was run down and even now not every district even has a dedicated Youth Exchange Officer there is insufficient expertise in the whole country to provide the knowledge base as to who is a suitable person into whose hands we can safely entrust our young people – and of course the reverse is true. And where the Brits are missing from these international gatherings no one questions it any more – they assume that we just do not want to be involved.

It is vital that districts give financial support to their DYEO to enable them to attend EEMA to enhance their own YE programme and for the greater good of YE in GB & I. The registration for the Conference covers full board for three days in the Conference hotel and the cost of the event for a delegate including flights is usually up to £1000 depending on the proximity of the venue.

The RI Pre-Convention

The Pre Convention takes place over two and a half days immediately before the RI Convention. The pattern of the programme is similar to the EEMA Conference – plenaries and workshops - but is led by RI and arranged by the RI Youth Exchange Committee. This is a world wide event and DYEOs from RIBI usually attend if they are also attending the Convention. The Registration fee covers daily attendance only.