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Introduction

Where Rotary Youth Exchange in Australia stands as of February 2006 and how we reached this position

Rotary has received a great compliment, something Rotarians who have been involved with Youth Exchange can be justifiably proud. Emeritus Professor Freda Briggs, an international authority on the protection of children and young people and previously a critic of Rotary's handling of exchange students, recently announced

“Rotary International is leading the world in the protection procedures they are putting in place to safeguard their exchange students”

What is more Professor Briggs said

“Much of the push for this world wide initiative of Rotary came from Australia.”

Professor Briggs was referring to stringent minimum procedures that Rotary International is placing on all Rotary Districts and Clubs that are involved in Youth Exchange. Procedures are being put in place to enable all clubs and districts who wish to participate in the Youth Exchange program to receive recognition for the high standard of duty of care they have adopted by way of mandating official certification. For us in Australia involved in Youth Exchange this is great news. It will mean all districts and clubs participating in Youth Exchange around the world will now have to comply with the high standards already in place in Australia or leave the program. It will be a great relief for those Rotarians placing students overseas to know that their students will be briefed, looked after and cared for in the same manner we brief, look after and care for our inbound students.

Joe Cohen-Cramp, the elected spokesman for all Youth Exchange District Chairmen in Australia said

Rotary International's initiative is a giant step forward in the world for Rotary Youth Exchange. Australia is extremely fortunate in that the group of Rotarians involved in Youth Exchange in this country have virtually all been kind and caring people whose only motivation is to help and look after our students ensuring they gain the maximum benefit from their exchange. We have always put student welfare first.

Joe went on to say

I doubt there is one club involved in Youth Exchange in Australia who can not quite easily comply with the new regulations. The new regulations will recognise and formalise what our clubs are already doing. Such is the caring nature of Rotarians involved in the programme that many are instinctively doing many of the tasks the new regulations require. The new regulations will now confirm to these hard working Rotarians what a fine job they have been doing.”

“Any Australian parents sending their child overseas would naturally and rightly want to know that the families who are to host them have been vetted and briefed and the student's accommodation checked. Conversely of course we must do the same here for all students coming to this country

“The instructions and checklists which will be given to certified clubs involved in student exchange will make it easier for clubs, particularly clubs who have not been regularly involved in exchange to participate. Another advantage of the new system is that a club, after completing the checklist and signing off, will be infinitely better protected in a court of law if something goes wrong and the club is sued. Regrettably as things stand now a club currently could be involved in a complex legal battle to try to prove their innocence.

The greatest advantage, however, of this new RI initiative is the knowledge that not only have we not forgotten something but that all of the many students our country places overseas will now be in the care of overseas districts and clubs who are now following similar “duty of care” procedures to those we will now be following in Australia”

This manual contains procedures for Districts and Clubs to follow and the necessary forms for clubs to receive official certification. Note that all clubs involved in student exchange after 30th June 2006 are required by RI to be certified.

The process which led to the certification requirement started back in November 2002 when the Board of Rotary International at its meeting in Bangkok agreed to the following *Statement of Conduct for Working with Youth*:

“Rotary International is committed to creating and maintaining the safest possible environment for all participants in Rotary activities. It is the duty of all Rotarians, Rotarians’ partners, and any volunteers to safeguard to the best of their ability the welfare of and to prevent the physical, sexual, or emotional abuse of children and young people with whom they come into contact through Rotary.”

In the light of that Statement, the Australian Rotary Youth Exchange Program Chairs’ Conference drafted a Student Protection Policy in October 2004. This policy was circulated to all 23 Australian Youth Exchange Chairs prior to presentation at the Australian Rotary Regional Institute in November 2004. At the Institute, this policy document was referred to a sub-committee for review.

In the interim many Districts adopted the ARYEPCC Student Protection Policy as their own District Youth Exchange Committee policy.

At the same time, RI, through General Secretary Ed Futa, raised the likelihood of RI moving to adopt a ‘certification process’, which Clubs and Districts who wished to participate in youth exchange would need to complete. The draft of RI’s ‘certification process’ was then released in June 2005 just prior to the RI Convention in Chicago.

The certification process requires Districts to draft specific policies which encompass the requirements of the RI draft but are specific to the laws of customs of the country where each District is located.

At the annual meeting of the ARYEPCC in Canberra in August, it was agreed that a ‘certification process’ for Australian Districts be drafted to assist Clubs and Districts meet the guidelines and minimum standards laid down by Rotary International. RI has declared that ‘certification’ is **mandatory**. Without ‘certification’ a Club or District **will not** be permitted to participate in the youth exchange program after 1st July 2006.

Australian Districts already have very extensive abuse and harassment policies and procedures in place, which ensure the highest possible standard of care to those young people who participate in the program and for whom we, as Rotarians, have responsibility. These guidelines and procedures are designed to assist Clubs and Districts in achieving ‘certification’ with the minimum of fuss. They have been developed to formalise what Clubs and Districts are currently operating under, and have much to be proud of in their development.

This certification process is also an important element in our responsibilities, to demonstrate to our Insurers that we are serious about risk management in youth programs, and justify their decision this year to include molestation cover under the Rotary liability policy.

Summary

An Executive Summary of the Club and District Certification Documentation

- RI has directed that **all** Rotary Districts worldwide that wish to be involved in Youth Exchange must develop a **policy and documentation** that embody the requirements in the draft policy, the volunteer affidavit and the reporting guidelines they have issued. This material is required to comply with local laws and customs.
- The policy developed and adopted by all Australian districts was approved by RI in December 2005. All districts must send the 2006-07 Certification Application to Evanston by 24th March 2006 to receive certification before the **30 June 2006** deadline to remain in the Youth Exchange program.
- RI has also directed that **all** Rotary Clubs who wish to be involved in Youth Exchange must obtain District confirmation that they have complied with the requirements of the RI draft policy, volunteer affidavit and reporting guidelines.
- The following documentation formalises current procedures already in place in most Australian Districts and Clubs.
- Many of the people involved in Youth Exchange already have Police Checks or an equivalent legal form of certification. In addition, RI now requires reference checks for **“Volunteers”** i.e. the classification of people directly involved with students in the YEP. To keep the program workable, we have introduced the classification of **“Responsible Adult”** for situations where the risk of abuse is negligible or very low.
- RI at this point requires documentation designed specifically for Youth Exchange, but Districts could without much difficulty adapt the procedures developed here for **other programs and activities**.
- Effective from 01 July 2006, **individual Rotary Districts** will be responsible for any **medical, legal or counselling costs** incurred as a result of sexual abuse or harassment. (Some of these costs may be recoverable under insurance).
- Having been signed off by RI and adopted by all Districts, the documentation has become the National Australian Certification Standard embodying RI’s risk management procedures. These procedures will become common to all our international partners on their receiving certification.

There are two key documents DI 1 and CL 1. They present the procedure **most Australian Districts have been following**, in a form that complies with **RI’s new requirements**.

DI 1 This all embracing policy sets out the things a **District** must do to **receive certification** including their certification of Clubs in the District.

CL 1 This is a policy document for **individual clubs** listing the procedures RI requires them to follow to **receive certification**.

Some of the remaining documents simplify the procedure for those involved in Youth Exchange to receive certification and ensure students remain safe. The balance of the documents comprises checklists, which enable those looking at the larger picture to see that all procedures have been followed. The vetting and training of key individuals in the program is seen as two of the most important factors in the protection policy.

- DI 2** A list of tips for students to assist them to keep themselves safe.
- DI 3** This is the RI document that spells out precisely what **must** be done in the case of a reported instance of sexual abuse and harassment.
- DI 4** Sets out the procedures to be used by the District Governor in assessing potential new members for the District Youth Exchange Committee, or by the District Committee.
- DI 5** A check list to enable District Youth Exchange Committees to verify that many of the important tasks relating to inbound students have been carried out. The checklists are forwarded to the District Governor so he/she knows all is in order with Youth Exchange.
- DI 6** A similar checklist to DI 5 but relates to the duties associated with outbound students.
- CL 2** A guide to assist clubs to select suitable host families
- CL 3** A similar document to CL 2 but designed to assist clubs in selecting a student counsellor or other volunteer who will have appreciable involvement with the student.
- CL 4** A form designed to obtain information required by RI, in respect of people having direct contact with Youth Exchange students.
- CL 5** Clubs will submit this document to their District Youth Exchange Committee to obtain certification to host an inbound student.
- CL 6** Similar to CL 5 but will be used by a Club to receive certification to sponsor an outbound student. CL 5 and CL 6 are of necessity two separate documents because the timing relating to organising an outbound student varies appreciably from that of preparing for an inbound student
- CL 7** A checklist for Clubs to confirm they have carried out all important duties. This form is passed to the District Committee so they also know a Club has fulfilled its obligations.
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