



Peacebuilder clubs: A blossoming dream

Alison Sutherland is the District Governor for Southern Wales, and Chair of the Rotary Action Group for Peace (RAGFP). She joined Rotary whilst living and working as a missionary in Uganda where she used her business skills to aid orphans and the church (North Kigezi Diocese). She then transferred to Tanzania, living and working in Singida, having set up an NGO and a centre for HIV/AIDS. During the last of her 11 years in East Africa, she moved to Dar-es-Salaam and joined the Rotary Club of Dar-es-Salaam. Alison shares the story behind the RAGFP and Peacebuilder clubs.

The Rotary Action Group for Peace (RAGFP) was formed in 2012. One of its big achievements is the creation of Peacebuilder Clubs. Peacebuilders are an important aspect of promoting peace. Everyone can be a Peacebuilder by living per the Rotary principles – Code of Conduct and The Four-Way Test – and lead by example.

The past year was very exciting following the launch of the Peacebuilder Club Initiative. Each Rotary club was required to have at least two members forming a peace committee, just like Foundation or Membership committees. These Rotarians then become members of the RAGFP. They help the club identify areas of peace to engage in, educate themselves as well as fellow Rotarians, within their club and district, about peace. To this end, they can access training on the Peace Academy. Check out the 'eight pillars of peace' – as posted on the Institute for Economics and Peace website – and take part in the training. Consequently, they and their club appear on the peace map on the RAGFP website.

The year 2020 started with around 50 Peacebuilder Clubs, and we now exceed 200. One of the surprising, and perhaps few, positives to come out of the COVID-19

pandemic was the growth of Peacebuilder Clubs, probably as a result of the surge of online and virtual events.

The Chair of the RAGFP hosted 'Chat with the Chair' five nights per week, which attracted Rotarians, Peacebuilder Clubs and fledgeling RAGFP chapters. It is great to see how they have inspired, encouraged and helped one another by sharing ideas and projects. The latest exciting initiative country-based chapters were borne from a conversation with Walter Gyger at the Rotary International Convention in Hamburg. Although, at first, RAGFP was reticent, because it did not want to promote possible nationalism at the potential expense of unity, soon it became clear the idea was a good one.

Country-based chapters

Country-based chapters can be likened to a holding company with regional offices, which are culturally relevant to their area and, most importantly, they represent the unique issues of that area. They work together to formulate a strategic plan, whilst simultaneously adhering to the mission and strategic plan of the holding company.

Currently, three chapters are piloting this concept in Serbia, Germany and Hong Kong. Each chapter has great achievements. Hong Kong brought in over 70 new members to RAGFP and 30 new Peacebuilder Clubs. A total of 65 Rotarians have participated in the Peace Academy training.

They hosted a Multi-District Conference with Peter Kyle and I as keynote speakers. They are undertaking a series of training sessions, assisted by Rotarian trainers from the USA with whom they connected

through the 'Chat with the Chair'.

A striking outcome from Switzerland was the Geneva Project Incubator which brought together over 50 Peace Fellows, 100 Rotarians and other organisations, each working together on the various aspects of peace projects. It is hoped that all forty-plus projects will receive funding from clubs through Global Grants.

One such project was suggested by a UK Peace Fellow, Amardeep Kainth, partnering with the RAGFP and War Child. The project, called Youth more enables the local youth to identify issues of concern, helps them to formulate a strategy to meet with the relevant parties involved and to bring change to the issue. The RAGFP reached out to the Rotary Club of Kampala Ssesse Islands which has gladly agreed to host the project. The RAGFP is also in talks with the Peace Centre at Makerere University.

Aside from the chapter achievements, other participants made great strides for peace. Some Rotarians are working with Karim Wasfi, a renowned cellist and conductor from Iraq. They produced a video called Shaping Peace of Karim and the orchestras which he set up in the war-torn areas of Iraq for World Peace Day.

After attending a 'Chat with Chair' session, Rotarians from Turkey sought to organise a conference around Gallipoli and Anzac Day. They were inspired by the other attendees and added more numbers to their group and successfully organised a Global Virtual Peace Conference in November 2020. RAGFP connected them to Peace Fellows, speakers and panellists. They got a global grant for peace as an outcome of this conference. It has been an honour to see this group grow in stature.

Engagement with Rotaractors

Bearing in mind the changed Rotaract status, Chehab Elawar a RAGFP Director, and the Chair hosted an online meeting of Rotaractors from over 20 countries. Thereafter, they organised a virtual Global Peace Conference in October 2020 with Rotary International President, Holger Knaack as their keynote speaker. RAGFP reduced its membership fees for Rotaractors in September and October 2020 which enabled Rotarians sponsor groups of 20 Rotaractors. Now, over 350 Rotaractors are members of the group. The Rotaract Clubs have been supported through speaking engagements.

Reem Ghunaim, RAGFP's Executive Director, held 'Together for Peace' talks with a varied and distinguished list of guests. She too works closely with the Institute of Economics and Peace (a partner). Reem produced a workbook breaking down the elements of peace within given projects. She regularly holds workshops on Positive Peace.

What about the future? RAGFP exists to conduct its mission to 'engage, educate and empower' Rotarians and others in the area of peace. We may not have all of the answers, or all the resources, but we know where to get them and how we can connect. We have speakers available (via zoom) and we have a desire to grow, support, inspire and encourage more involvement in peace-related projects, both within the local community and globally, in East Africa. Asante Sana. Karibu.

For more information visit:

rotaryactiongroupforpeace.org

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