



## 2007 RYLA

*By Derek Roberts, District RYLA Chair, 2006-2007*

What a fantastic RYLA year we have had. I have never experienced anything like it. Every one of the nine O/C meetings was full of commitment and so full of humour, sheer pleasure to attend. And the icing on the cake, we are sending our top two RYLarians to Salt Lake City in June. RI extended the deadline from December 1 to January 2 then February 2 then March 26 for attendance at International RYLA, June 14-17.

But let's go back to the beginning. Within minutes of me finishing my RYLA presentation at last year's District Assembly I was approached by PP Peter Tse and PP Uncle James Yick pledging their support. I left my first meeting in June with DGE Tony and New Generations Chair, Grace Yen absolutely thrilled. I had been with two Rotarians who were totally supportive of RYLA. Positions on the new O/C were quickly filled and our first meeting, July 10, was unreal. Within a very short time and a feature of my meetings is never to go over 90 minutes. We had put in place a constructive programme that had such clear objectives for the new Rotary Year.

Using experience from my years in Australian Rotary and contacts on UK RYLA committees I had meetings with four leadership training organizations in May and June before inviting HKYI to be our main RYLA programme provider. And this choice was one of the main reasons for giving me my best year ever in any youth programme and I came to HK from a great club in NSW as Director of 12 youth programmes, plus experience of District GSE and YEP.

Our original age group of 17-23 was revised to 17-25 after concerns from Rotaractors. Our dates for camp went from February 22-24 to March 1-4 until finally settling on February 24-27. We were all happy with the facilities at The Duke of Edinburgh Training Camp, Lam Tseun, Tai Po, and with its maximum number of 80 RYLA participants plus 24 tutors and mentors. Applicants were asked for a \$300 registration fee that would be refunded on completion of the programme with a cut-off date of December 15 for applications. In true Hong Kong fashion the applications came in a rush... Dec 11, 28...Dec 12, 46...Dec 15, 145. Selections were made on Dec 19 for the 80 most qualified in terms of community service and participation in leadership programmes and every applicant, successful and unsuccessful, was notified the next day. We did have a problem with incomplete email addresses but our HKYI Secretariat overcame that.

The breakdown was interesting. Of the 145 there were 24 Rotaractors from HK, one from Macau and 8 from Mongolia. The Macau applicant was selected together with 16 from HK and 4 from Mongolia. By far the largest group came from Non-Interact Secondary. 60 and 36 were selected. We had 24 HK Interactors and 11 were selected. 37% of successful applicants were aged 17. The next highest was 12% aged 19, then 7% aged 22.

We had a successful Orientation Day at The Teenage Warehouse, Aberdeen, on Sunday, January 28. The 80 were put into 8 groups, with their tutors and were introduced to their Rotarian Mentors, Camp Warden, IPP Chee Lung Tham, RC Admiralty and Deputy Warden, Chelsia To, RC Queensway. The day concluded with a BBQ to consolidate the Rotary spirit of Fellowship. Everything had been organized by Ivan Tam, the training camp organizer, and his staff from the HKYI and Warehouse.

The good effects of January 28 could be seen on the first day of camp, February 24, with groups turning up wearing distinctive markings. Allowing for the usual drop-outs we increased the number to 83 and then, as so often happens at RYLA camps,







we ended up with 74, 9 losing their \$300. Many of the 9 dropped out in the afternoon of February 23 and although our applications' secretary, Rainbow Mak, at HKYI, tried to fill the places, it proved impossible at such short notice.

The four day camp was a mixture of physical activities and input sessions from leading Rotarians, including, DGE Peter. One of the many highlights was a visit to Crossroads International where they were put through memorable simulation exercises such as making paper shopping bags from newspaper and trying to sell them in order to buy food or pay rent pretty hard when they were looking at \$2.40 HK for a few hundred bags They also experienced a slum meal.

Instead of having a separate day for presentations the RYLARIans were presented with certificates and group photographs on Day 4. During the four days each of the 8 groups was asked to nominate one from the group to attend an interview on March 5 to select the top RYLARIan to attend International RYLA, June 14-17 and RI Convention, June 17-20. The quality of students was very high and it was no surprise to find we ended up with a total of 12 as tutors and mentors were also asked to nominate. All presentations were conducted by DG Tony who also gave letters of information to the 12 selected.

And the TOP RYLARIAN selected on March 5. Rotaractor Nettie Ng, a first year student at CUHK and nominated by RC Bayview Sunshine. And, a few days later, RI informed us that we could send a second RYLARIAN. Great news as we had an excellent second choice. Apple Tang, a social worker. Because we were able to use the surplus RYLA shirts from last year, with slight modifications, we were able to realize a saving in our budget that the O/C agreed to put towards Apple's costs. Our DG Tony also agreed to give financial support. Nettie's costs will be fully met by District.

In conclusion I would like to mention the support given to our 4 Rotaract Mongolian participants. One could not leave work until the first day of camp so was flown down by her employer...and back. The other 3 arrived in HK early and on February 23 were looked after by Chee Lung at his RC Admiralty lunch. Andy Stoll, Ambassadorial Scholar from Iowa and hosted by RC Tai Po, was with them and stayed with them and then took them to dinner arranged at CCC by PP Uncle James Yick, HK City North, I was able to attend with my wife, Mary, and we had such a delightful time. I was amazed should not have been...by their high level of English. When we had the nominations for the top Rylarian two of the Mongolians were nominated. They had to return on March 1 and could not stay for the interviews. There was a suggestion that the selection committee should consider audio/video interviews for them. This never got off the ground. They left HK on March 1 and because of the worst fall of snow in northern China and Mongolia since 1951 did not cross into Mongolia until March 7. They had been snowed in for all that time.

On March 19 we held our O/C Evaluation Dinner at CCC generously hosted by DG Tony. I shall be returning soon to District 9650 in northern NSW and am so happy to learn that Chee Lung has accepted the position of RYLA Chair for 2007-2008 and that most of the committee will be the same. What great news for our youth.