

## **Rotary Youth Leadership Awards (RYLA) 2011-2012**

**by PP Alex Leung of RYLA Chair**

The Lunar New Year holiday was supposed to be a time to say “Kung Hey Fat Choy” and to get red packets from relatives. Nevertheless, 56 young people who were strictly selected from different diversities of Hong Kong, Macao, Guangzhou, Beijing and Mongolia, assembled themselves in Kowloon Tong early in the chilly morning on January 26<sup>th</sup> 2012. Although they knew that they would learn something in the Rotary Youth Leadership Awards (“RYLA”) Camp, they might never imagine that a big “surprise” had been laid for them and after completing all the challenges, they would be proud of it in their whole life!

In the meantime, the RYLA Organizing Committee (“OC”) 2011-2012 and over 20 facilitators were very excited because they were going to see the result of their preparation in the past six months. They had squeezed their time from work, studies and social life with the sole purpose in leading the participants with the theme of the camp:

“The O.N.E.”, i.e. Own their responsibility, expand their Network and Embrace all happenings around them.

Having got on board the shuttle coaches, all participants divided in four teams were blind folded and “kidnapped” by their facilitators to Sai Kung peninsula then all of them walked with their heavy rucksacks whereas a team of “devil” instructors barked around until they reached the seashore. Unexpectedly and at a temperature of 8 degree C, all participants soaked in water and they had to cross the sea by means of a raft to their campsite at the opposite Wong Yi Chau Island. Their effort was witnessed by DG David, PDG Tony WONG, other District leaders and Rotarians who subsequently marked the start of the training programme in the Opening Ceremony.

Throughout the 4-days-3-nights camp, these young people took part in various sorts of team building and problem solving exercises, high events and survival training so that they could build up their confidence, identify their strengths and learn how to work in tough situation with other people. They had to go through many physical challenges followed with debriefings by their respective team facilitators.

The highlight of the camp was that in the evening of Day 2, all participants woke up at 10 pm from their sweet dream. After a quick packing, they jumped into a shuttle ferry for Pak A village where they started their long journey night march and returned to the camp site at 8.30 am on Day 3. En route, they had to overcome their fear by walking through bushes in darkness and worked closely together with their team members in handling different crisis under limited resources.

Other than the intensive training, all enjoyed their backwoods cooking, cultural exchange performance. The camp fire over 10-feet-high definitely allowed them to burn away all their differences and they danced and sang happily in the evening of Day 3. It might be the first time for most of the participants to enjoy real Mongolian folk dance performed by five Mongolian participants who dressed in their traditional costumes. The wholehearted participation and true hearted sharing of everyone undoubtedly built up a strong bonding with each other, regardless of their background and language. When all participants bided farewell to their Mongolians buddies who had to leave in the early morning of Day 4 for their flight, many people burst into tears as they did not know when they could meet each other again.

In the Closing Ceremony, all participants made a declaration in front of over 30 District leaders and Rotarians, that they would organize a large scale charity service project within 100 days, so that they might use what they learned and their established network to serve other people in need.

There was also a little change of the selection process for the Best RYLarian this year in which all facilitators nominated two candidates from their respective teams. The nominees were required to give a 3-minute impromptu presentation of themselves in front of all participants who might raise critical questions to test the capabilities of the nominees. The participants then voted for their Best RYLarian and 1<sup>st</sup> Runner.

With the generous support of PP Alice Liu, the skipper of “The Spirit of Hong Kong”, surprised the Best RYLarian (Miss Yuky TAM of Hong Kong) and the 1<sup>st</sup> Runner Up (Mr. Henry LEI of Macao) by sailing them away the Island as the greatest honour of their prize. Consequently, they were bided farewell by DG David, PDG Tony and all attendees in the campsite before they had been escorted by 5 Rotarians on board and departed the pier for Causeway Bay.

In all, the Camp was completed successfully and smoothly through the concerted effort of everyone. All participants enjoyed very much although they might not have enough sleep due to the intensive and demanding programme. There were also a lot of touching moments in which participants cried in their sharing as they felt the love and care of their team mates.

The OC is now preparing for the evaluation and financial reports. They are also supporting the charity service which is being organized by the participants.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank for all the supports from our District leaders, Rotarians, Organizing Committee, facilitators, instructors and most importantly, all the RYLarians. Last but not least, all the visitors to the Camp to inspire our youth with words of wisdom, to provide encouragements and cheer us up despite of the cold weather. Special thanks must go to my beloved wife, PP Katherine Yuen, who took care of the logistic arrangements especially when I had been in the Camp. This “Once In A Life Time” RYLA Camp would not come to fruition without all of your support! Salute!