Rotary International Student Exchange History

The most powerful force in the promotion of international understanding and peace is exposure to different cultures. The world becomes a smaller, friendlier place when we learn that all people - regardless of nationality - desire the same basic things: a safe, comfortable environment that allows for a rich and satisfying life for ourselves and our children. Youth Exchange provides thousands of young people with the opportunity to meet people from other lands and to experience their cultures, thus planting the seeds for a lifetime of international understanding.

The first documented exchanges date back to 1929, when the Rotary Club of Copenhagen, Denmark, initiated exchanges with European students. Exchanges between clubs in California, USA, and Latin American countries began in 1939. The reciprocal long-term academic exchange grew in popularity during the 1950s and became the primary type of Rotary Youth Exchange. In 1972, the Rotary International Board of Directors agreed to recommend Youth Exchange to clubs worldwide as a worthwhile international activity promoting global peace and understanding. Since 1929, students and host families all over the world have had their horizons broadened and their lives enriched by the generosity of Rotary's Youth Exchange program. Administered by Rotary clubs, districts and multi-district groups, the program today involves more than 80 countries and more than 8,000 students each year.