

RYPEN fosters newest Hi-5 STAR

David Clark knows firsthand the difference the Rotary Youth Program of Enrichment makes to the lives of young participants.

By David Clark

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District 9685 RYPEN winter camp chair

I WAS at a club meeting where the Rotary Youth Program of Enrichment (RYPEN) students attending the next winter camp were being introduced, when a member leant over and said, "I reckon RYPEN is a complete waste of our club's money."

I was taken aback, as I have been running RYPEN in four different districts for over 20 years.

He elaborated, "Yes, they come back saying they had a great time and it changed their lives, but how do we know if RYPEN really does good long-term?"

I thought about this for a while and decided to do a survey. I asked five students from several camps held in recent years the question: "Did anything you learnt or gained from the RYPEN camp you attended help you in your school or social life any time after the camp and into your future life?"

The results were clearly in RYPEN's favour: 81 per cent said YES; 10 per cent said they weren't sure, but they did have a great time and enjoyed the experience. Only a small 9 per cent answered NO: it was enjoyable, but they didn't get anything out of it.

"I went because my dad was a Rotarian and he said I had to go," RYPEN participant Heather said. "As you can imagine, I was not keen to be there, but within two hours the program had already changed my mind.

I really got stuck in, even getting up and public speaking, which I had never been able to do before. I returned the following year as a mentor leader and have now done five camps up in the Blue Mountains. I have joined a Rotary e-club and am now giving back to the community, and thank Rotary and RYPEN every day for my great and exciting life!"

Sam found RYPEN similarly transformational.

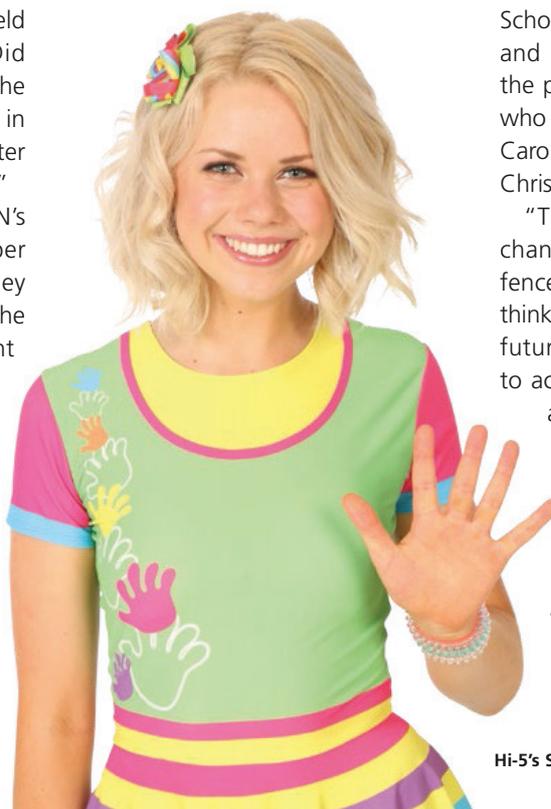
"Thinking back, it was RYPEN that gave me the courage to apply for Rotary Youth Exchange after I finished Year 12. When I went to RYPEN I was quiet

and not very active, spending my time on schoolwork and playing computer games. RYPEN changed my perspective. I was accepted to go to Germany as a Rotary Youth Exchange student, where I spent the best 12 months of my life. I now live in Germany working as a doctor in the local hospital and refugee holding camps. Thank you to Rotary for this wonderful program!"

Siobhan Clifford, a 15-year-old from Winmalee High school in the Blue Mountains with a passion for music, said the RYPEN camp gave her the strength and courage to follow her dream to sing. Siobhan, known as Shay, went on to perform at the Schools Spectacular on two occasions and has just been selected as one of the performers in the new Hi-5 team, who had their first performance at the Carols by Candlelight in Melbourne on Christmas Eve.

"The RYPEN camp was really a life changer, as I was just sitting on the fence," Shay said. "It really made me think about what I wanted to do in the future and to make goals and plans to achieve it. Thank you Rotary. I will always think about that weekend that changed my life."

I received comment after comment telling me, yes, RYPEN does work. I have seen firsthand the results, and urge all Rotarians to visit a camp to witness the effects themselves. RYPEN truly changes lives. •



Hi-5's Siobhan "Shay" Clifford.