

# A Talk about Interact

Presented to District 9690 District Assembly 3 May 2009

The genesis of INTERACT was the idea of RI President Harold T Thomas in 1960. He wanted to tap the potential of young people in the 14 – 18 age group. He urged Rotary Clubs around the world to find ways to encourage service, foster an active interest in the community among this group of young people. He also felt this was a great opportunity to develop leaders to go on to greater things.

In 1962 the first INTERACT Club was formed with 23 students at a high school in Florida. From these humble beginnings there are now 11,695 Interact Clubs around the world with almost 270,000 members as of March 2009. District 9690 has three Interact Clubs and it would be great if this number could be increased



Thousands of communities around the world have benefited from the services of INTERACT Clubs. Interactors themselves have discovered a programme that offers fun while engaging in fund raising and meaningful service activities. It also provides a chance to develop leadership skills and meet new friends.

Because INTERACT Clubs are sponsored by their local Rotary Club there is a direct link with the School which is a great benefit when looking for candidates for the other youth programmes like RYPEN, MUNA and later RYLA. The attendance of a Rotarian at each of their meetings gives an insight into the wonderful attributes of today's young people.

There is an enormous potential with the number of High Schools we have in District 9690 to start new INTERACT Clubs. This is a challenge because it does require some dedication on the part of a Faculty Adviser, usually a teacher (who may be or may not be a Rotarian) to attend meetings. It also requires the attendance of a Rotarian advisor at all Club and Board meetings to act as a mentor and guide without getting too involved. INTERACT clubs must meet at least twice a month, not holiday times of course, meetings usually last for a half an hour during the school lunch break.

I do not believe it is necessary to discuss here the mechanics of forming a new INTERACT club as this is very well documented in the RI Interact Handbook which is available on the net or in hard copy from the Rotary International South Pacific office at 100 George Street Parramatta. The handbook contains all the information needed

to start and maintain a successful Interact Club and how Rotary should support INTERACT at a Club level. Of course I would be more than happy to assist any Rotary Club in District 9690 who would like to form a new Interact Club or perhaps help to revitalise an existing INTERACT Club.

As I mentioned before there is often a link with a school to the other Rotary Programmes, particularly RYPEN, which falls in the age group for Interact. Normally Interactors drop out at the end of year 11 to enable them to devote their last year at School studying for their HSC. This link I am sure would be beneficial to a Rotary Club contemplating starting a new INTERACT Club. There is often a teacher who looks after RYPEN and MUNA and this is good introduction to the school when looking for interest in starting a new INTERACT Club. You need to have an interested and enthusiastic teacher staff member to act as the faculty adviser for the fledgling INTERACT Club to get off to good start. Of course this enthusiasm needs to be maintained as teachers come and go from schools and they are busy people. A good solid foundation and a commitment by the sponsoring Rotary Club is essential for a successful and lasting INTERACT Club.

The INTERACT Club at Meriden School in Strathfield was sponsored by the Rotary Club of Strathfield in 1981 and has been operating very successfully since those early days. One of the reasons for success has been the excellent advisers the School has provided over the years to assist in the running of the Meriden INTERACT Club.



There has also been great support from various individual members of the Rotary Club of Strathfield who have attended their weekly lunchtime meetings. Towards the end of each academic year the year 11 girls who have been the INTERACT Club's President, Vice President, Secretary and Treasurer hand over to a newly elected Board of girls who at the time are in year 10. Like Rotary Clubs they hold a special changeover meeting and badges are presented to the new Board who wear the badges with pride on their school uniform. The purchase of badges from RDU is the only expense of the Rotary Club. After payment of \$5, as a donation to the INTERACT Club, new members from years 9 and 10 receive a lapel badge, this is the only cost to belong to the Interact Club apart from being involved in various fund raising functions during the school year. The main one at Meriden being a dance usually held in March which this year raised \$4500. To make sure this is always successful the members of Strathfield RC help with checking the invited students from local High Schools who have pre-paid tickets to obtain entrance – it is always an enjoyable night for the Rotarians who attend. Sadly these days tight security is essential for this type of function. Everybody has a

lot of fun and it is a great learning curve for the Interactors. This year they are going to purchase another Shelter Box and also help in the fight against malaria with a donation to RAM (Rotarians against Malaria). Each year we invite the four Board members, together with their school advisor, to a suitable Rotary meeting where they can tell the Club about their activities and plans for the year. The current membership of the Meriden Interact Club is 21 girls and the 2009 President is Clarrissa Fasanella.

Of course we have had our failures in trying to maintain other INTERACT Clubs we have started in our Rotary Club area and we are currently trying to re-establish a Club at a nearby girls HS.

In conclusion I would like to quote from the RI Interact website:

***It all starts with Interact***

*Today's young people will become tomorrow's parents, professionals, and business and community leaders. With the help of programs like Interact, they can gain the tools and skills necessary for developing into responsible, productive members of society. Now is the time for Rotary clubs to focus on the future by challenging new generations to test their talents, to develop new skills, and to confront some of the issues they'll face in their lifetimes. The Interact program can instill life skills that members can share with others for generations to come*

Next years theme says it all



Thank you for listening

**Roger Vince  
Chair  
District 9690 Interact Committee**