

Introducing the Rotary Youth Network

How do you take the best from the worst?

None of us will forget how the pandemic altered our world and our lives. Each of us had to traverse this period of uncertainty, and no one had a free pass from the effects.

I personally believe this has created space for a different kind of global leadership — one that is courageous, empathetic, and vulnerable. I met my good friend Anniela Carracedo online in early 2020. She is one such leader, and I'm thrilled to turn this month's column over to her.

—JENNIFER JONES



1月にアメリカ・フロリダ州オーランドで開催された国際協議会でスピーチをしたアニエラ・カラセドさん

In March 2020, I had a panic attack. I couldn't breathe, and I felt a terrible pain in my chest.

It had been a few days since the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a global pandemic, and I was in the middle of my year as a Rotary Youth Exchange student in the United States. Think about it: an 18-year-old girl stuck in a different country, with a foreign language, with people she had only met six months before. It was scary.

But I am familiar with uncertainty. I was born and raised in Venezuela, which is going through one of the worst humanitarian and political crises in the Western Hemisphere. But my mom always said, "Challenges are nothing more than needs that require a solution."

I called up my Interact and Youth Exchange friends. Together, we organized an online meeting to share projects and get inspired by what everyone else was doing during the quarantine. In that first meeting, we had 70 people, mainly students, from 17 countries.

From that beginning, we built an online platform for Rotary youths worldwide to share their experiences and inspire others with project ideas during isolation. We looked for mentors and supporters who would help our group connect young people, share cultures, and open new collaborative opportunities for international service projects. We called it Rotary Interactive Quarantine, or RIQ.

After only a year, we engaged with more than 5,000 students from 80 countries. Several of our team members became district Interact representatives and district committee members, and some of us even serve on Rotary International councils.

Eventually, quarantine restrictions were being lifted, and the needs of our participants were changing. At our last official meeting as RIQ, Past RI President Barry Rassin inspired us to create even bigger change, so we transformed RIQ into the Rotary Youth Network, or RYN.

A few of our members, including me, were selected to serve on the inaugural Interact Advisory Council, where we presented our vision for youth in Rotary to the RI Board of Directors.

Our presentation to the Board inspired President Jennifer and her team to create a Youth Advisory Council in Rotary International, which I am honored to serve on as a co-chair.

The Rotary Youth Network officially launched during a breakout session at the 2022 Rotary International Convention in Houston. Five of us, who had participated in Interact, Youth Exchange, and Rotary Youth Leadership Awards, traveled across continents to launch an organization we had kicked off online two years before. The convention was the first time we had met in person.

When my friends and I finished our talk, we realized more than 500 people were giving us a standing ovation. Tears filled our eyes, and the feeling of excitement and accomplishment took over.

Who would have thought that a panic attack would lead to this?

ANNIELA CARRACEDO

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