

Educational Reading #1

RYLA – Rotary Youth Leadership Awards

Leadership is not something people are simply born with—it is a skill that can be developed. Recognizing this, Rotary created the **Rotary Youth Leadership Awards**, better known as **RYLA**.

RYLA is an intensive leadership development program for young people, typically between the ages of 14 and 30, depending on the district. Most programs are held over several days at camps, conference centers, or colleges, where participants are immersed in activities designed to build leadership, teamwork, communication, and self-confidence.

Unlike a traditional classroom, RYLA emphasizes learning by doing. Participants work together to solve problems, complete challenges, and discuss real-life situations that require ethical decision-making and cooperation. Many activities take place outdoors or in small groups, encouraging students to step outside their comfort zones.

One of RYLA's greatest strengths is its focus on servant leadership—the idea that true leaders seek to serve others rather than simply direct them. This philosophy aligns perfectly with Rotary's motto, **Service Above Self**.

Throughout the program, students explore topics such as goal setting, conflict resolution, public speaking, teamwork, emotional intelligence, and ethical leadership. They also meet community leaders, business professionals, and Rotarians who share their experiences and encourage participants to pursue lives of service.

Many RYLA graduates describe the experience as life-changing. They often discover strengths they did not realize they possessed, develop lasting friendships, and return home with increased confidence and motivation.

Rotary clubs benefit as well. Clubs often sponsor students to attend RYLA, and many participants later become Interactors, Rotaractors, or Rotarians. Others remain active in community service throughout their lives, even if they never join Rotary.

RYLA also creates a network of young leaders who support one another long after the program ends. Alumni frequently collaborate on community projects, professional opportunities, and volunteer initiatives.

One of the most valuable aspects of RYLA is that it teaches leadership through values rather than titles. Participants learn that leadership is demonstrated through integrity, compassion, responsibility, and the ability to inspire others.

As communities face increasingly complex challenges, the need for ethical, capable leaders continues to grow. By investing in young people today, Rotary helps ensure that tomorrow's

leaders will be prepared not only to succeed professionally but also to strengthen their communities through service.