



A Brief History of Rotaract

As early as 1935, Rotary Founder Paul Harris discovered a youth organisation based on Rotarian principles during a trip to Australia.

In the 1950s, many clubs made up of young adults or students had been created and sponsored by Rotary clubs. They functioned in a non-official manner and under different names. These clubs include the "Paul Harris Circles" created in Europe - in particularly significant numbers in Belgium and Italy - and the "Rotors" clubs created in some American universities. What these organisations had in common is that they were made up of young people, mostly children of Rotarians and their friends. Their function and objectives were similar to those that are the main features of Rotaract clubs today.

In 1959, André Geubel, founding president of the Paul Harris Circle of Péruwelz in Belgium, described his club as "A huge ship sailing toward peace and understanding, flying the flag of friendship, with a rudder of 'Service' and a crew made up of all young people of goodwill". Today, this description still applies to Rotaract.

In 1965, these organisations experienced significant growth, linked to the creation of the Interact Program by Rotary International in 1963. In fact, many Interactors, having reached the age limit, decided to create a new type of club: "Senior Interact clubs". One of the Interact Clubs which took this approach was the Interact Club of Secundrabad in District 3150, India, who, with the aid and guidance of their parent Rotary club, formed a University Service Club called "Universe". It took very little time for the leaders of Rotary International, particularly then President Luther H. Hodges, to realise the importance of these clubs and of their action. Then, in 1968, the RI Board of Directors decided to adopt the program officially and to make it one of the most important programs among the different services that Rotary International offers young adults.

The new programme was baptised "Rotaract", which comes from the contraction of the words Rotary and Action. The first charter was awarded on March 13, 1968 to the Rotaract Club of North Charlotte. Although officially Rotary International announced that this club was the first Rotaract club, and therefore that Rotaract was born in the USA, we should bear in mind that a significant number of clubs for young adults affiliated to Rotary changed names and thereby joined the new organisation immediately after the creation of the club in Charlotte. These clubs were the foundation that allowed Rotaract to spread immediately throughout the world, and to have higher membership today on continents other than North America.

Rotaract was launched officially with a letter of announcement from the President of Rotary International to the Presidents of Rotary Clubs worldwide. This program "to develop leadership and responsible citizenship through service to the community" in young adults between the age of 18 and 28, and with goals more or less parallel to Rotary objectives, captured the imagination of Rotarians in many countries, particularly Australia.

Australia had the distinction of chartering the 4th and 7th clubs in the world, namely Brisbane West, Queensland on 16 June 1968, and Shellharbour, New South Wales in August 1968. In the first five years of the Rotaract program, Australia had 288 of the 1,543 clubs worldwide.

After its official creation, the Rotaract organisation was for many years considered by Rotary International as nothing more than a Rotary clubs' community program. The 1990s marked a turning point in Rotaract history with the creation of Multidistrict Organisations in Europe, Australia and South America. These groups have made it possible for Rotaract to become the "Partners in Service" of Rotary Clubs, as described by Past RI President Rajendra Saboo. This change in the way Rotaract is considered by Rotary was enhanced in 1996/97 by RI President Luis Vicente Giay, who made the development of Rotaract one of his top priorities.