

I was one of the speakers at a breakout session at the Convention in Hamburg June 4th 2019. This is my story about Youth Exchange programme.

Ry den 24 June 2019

HOW IT ALL BEGAN - Rotary Youth Exchange programme.

Peace Building Societies

We need to work for peace in the world, and Rotary is an organisation who has the goal to make understanding across borders, between countries and people.

Rotarians was a part of designing the United Nation as a worldwide peace organisation after the second world war. This Rotary year [2019-20 RI president Mark Maloney](#) will celebrate the 75 anniversary for signing the UN charter.

As Rotary Public Image coordinator my focus is where I can find great stories showing Rotary as an organisation with people of action. Dedicated people who really want to change the world for the better, and inspires people to join Rotary.

Some of the best stories are about young people, who are a part of Rotarys youth exchange programme. This gives me the reason to tell about how it all started.

A visionary Rotarian

I will tell about a visionary Danish man, who had an idea, how he could bring peace and international understanding into the organization Rotary, so the world could be a more peaceful place to live.

We have to go back in time as long as 1929. Some members in The Rotary club of Copenhagen had an idea to send out young people to other countries. But the idea was first brought to life many years later.

Many years we only had one governor taking care of all clubs in Denmark. The last one was Aage Jensen in the Rotary year 1948-49. This governor decided to start up a little committee of Rotarians in Denmark with focus at young people and how Rotary could start up an exchange programme.

One of the members in the committee was a new Rotarian Svend Larsen from the town Holbæk. He was a school headmaster, and he was ask by the governor to visit several Rotary clubs in Denmark and talk about "We and our young people"

At the same time in the Rotary club of Copenhagen one of the members Aage Rasmussen also started to talk about how Rotary could make an exchange program for young people.

It was a new beginning of an Inter-European exchange programme. 5 years later more than 40 young Danish boys and girls apply and wanted to participate in the Rotary summer exchange programme.

Exchange programme as a summer holyday.

Aage Rasmussen from Copenhagen Rotary Club did a great job.

In the summer 1955 he arranged tours around in Denmark for exchanges students from other European countries, and it happened on a voluntary basic. He was very dedicated - but it was a really hard job for only one Rotarian.

After a meeting in Basel, Germany 1957 - Rotary decided to establish national offices and two years after in 1959 Denmark had the first summer camp with 40 participants. In the beginning the exchanges programme was like a summer holyday trip for the young people.

The young Rotarian Svend Larsen - the school headmaster from 1948 - as you heard about earlier - became one of the Danish governors in 66. And when he finished his job as governor - he started to work together with Rasmussen from Copenhagen Rotary club. Now they were 2 Rotarian taking care of the exchange programme in Denmark.

The school headmaster Svend Larsen from Holbæk had a new idea. He wanted to make youth exchange programme outside Europe. He wanted to start up a programme together with Rotary districts in US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

In 1967 the programme became international.

The young people could now spend a hole year as an exchange student in another country. It was the beginning of what we today name long term exchange.

At the convention In Kansas City in 1985 the International President Carlos Canseco in his great speech to all Rotarian talked about "The 5 milestones in Rotarys history".

- 1. *The first Rotary club in Canada***
- 2. *The Rotary Foundation***
- 3. *The Health, Hunger and Humanity programme***
- 4. *The Polio Plus programme.***
- 5. *The Youth Exchange programme started in Denmark***

Today about 9000 young people all over the world every year participate in short and long term exchange programme.

More than 100 countries and hundreds of Rotary districts are involved in the programmes.

The benefits for the young exchange students are

- Developing lifelong leadership skills
- Learn a new language and culture
- Build lasting friendships with young people from around the world
- and finally be a global citizen.

For me it is really PEACE BUILDING

Rotary gives the young people life experiences

My daughter was exchange student in Mexico and my son in US for years ago. They came home with a lot of experience, and still it's a part of their life today. And I'm sure they learned the important of International understanding and peace building between countries. Thanks to some good and visionary Rotarians who succeeded with a brilliant idea many years ago. Specially to the school master and Past District governor Svend Larsen from the little Danish town Holbæk in Denmark and his worldwide vision.

I will end this little article by giving you a link to one of my youtube film - showing a short film from a Summer camp in Denmark 2018. The young people tells about the important of knowing another country and make understanding between nations.

You can find other film at <https://www.rotary.dk/rotaryvideoer>

The Summer Camp: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L8gvQjJsD2E&feature=youtu.be>

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Breakout session Peace Building
 Convention Hamburg 2019
 Speaker Leif Fritsdal with the story
 about exchange programme
 "How it all began"



Svend Larsen, born 1899 in Taastrup, Denmark became a schoolmaster in 1930 for Stenhus Bording School in Holbæk.

He was inspired by Summer Home Stay and Summer camp idea, and he became the founder of the overseas Rotary one year exchange programme. He continued his work in 18 years. When he was 84 years old he passed it on to his his successor.