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Rotary and the UN SDGs – A Common Dream for a Better World

The challenges before humanity are vast—but so is our collective will to overcome them. Rotary's Seven Areas of Focus and the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are not two separate agendas; they are two sides of the same coin, united by one dream: a world that thrives on peace, health, dignity, and hope.

When Rotary builds peace, it mirrors the UN's call for justice and strong institutions. When it fights disease, it fuels the global promise of health for all. Rotary's clean water projects echo the world's thirst for safe sanitation. Its care for mothers and children reminds us that saving one life saves an entire future. Its literacy initiatives spark the flame of education, the true equalizer of societies. Economic empowerment projects create pathways out of poverty, while its focus on the environment safeguards the planet we all call home.

The message is clear: Rotary's 7 and the UN's 17 are partners in purpose. Each initiative, each project, each act of service is a brick in the foundation of a more humane and sustainable tomorrow.

Rotary proves that the global goals are not just policies on paper—they are possibilities in action. Together, with hands joined and hearts aligned, we can transform today's challenges into tomorrow's victories.

Subhojit Roy

To Address a Maternal Health Crisis, Rotary Members help Midwives Build Leadership Skills and Professional Networks

By Hannah Shaw



About 830 women and 7,000 newborns, mainly in low- and middle-income countries, die each day because of complications related to pregnancy and childbirth. These deaths are mostly preventable. Midwives are key to preventing them, so an initiative organized by Rotary members is supporting the essential work of midwives in Papua New Guinea and Australia.

According to the World Health Organization, increasing the number of midwives worldwide by just 10% could save up to 1.3 million lives each year. Rotary clubs are working to help meet that need, in part through leadership and advocacy training. Working with the Australian College of Midwives and the Papua New Guinea Midwifery Society, they launched the Papua New Guinea Midwifery Leadership Buddy Project. As of April 2025, the project has helped 52 midwives from Papua New Guinea and 31 from Australia develop their skills.



Julie Kep (right), a midwife and facilitator for the Papua New Guinea Midwifery Leadership Buddy Project, speaks with Torea Tore at Port Moresby General Hospital during a Papua New Guinea Midwifery Leadership Buddy Project workshop. Midwives do much more than deliver babies. In some places, they facilitate up to 90% of essential sexual, reproductive, maternal, newborn, and adolescent health services.

The program is rooted in collaboration. Australian midwives are paired with midwives from Papua New Guinea for five-day leadership workshops. The process culminates in a yearlong community health project designed and led by the midwives in Papua New Guinea, with continued support from their Australian counterparts.

Project organizer Judith Brown, a retired midwife and past president of the Rotary Club of Morialta, South Australia, says the exchange between the midwives is reciprocal and prioritizes learning from one another's strengths. The partnership enables midwives to learn about other cultures and develop their professional skills, Brown says, but the primary focus is "trying to help women just have a voice in both countries."

Helen Hall leads a session for the Papua New Guinea Midwifery Leadership Buddy Project. She joined the Rotary Club of Rosebud-Rye in Victoria, Australia, after getting involved in the project through the Australian College of Midwives. Rotary members are, she says, "people I want to spend time with. ... They look locally, they look nationally, and they look globally at what they can do and how can they bring their skills into it."

These collaborations have had lasting effects, from providing essential equipment to addressing issues like teen pregnancy. But at the heart of the program are the enduring connections between midwives who share specialized knowledge, a sense of global community, and a commitment to saving lives.

Eco-Brick by Eco-brick, Interactors in Peru Learn the Magic of Rotary



Raquel Lozano Fernández hugs Romina Abigail Solia (left) and Valeria Reymundo Zabrano, two of the Interactors participating in the eco-brick project and the social-emotional workshops at the Bellavista school.

As Raquel Lozano Fernández explained, the mission was twofold. The 2024-25 president of the Rotary Club of Lima, Peru, Lozano is also the adviser for the Interact Club of Abraham Valdelomar, which is sponsored by the Lima club. Under the guidance of Lozano and other Rotarians, the Interactors embarked on an ambitious project to transform plastic bottles and other recyclable materials into eco-bricks. The bricks were then used to create tables and chairs for the Bellavista school in Independencia, a municipality north of Lima's city center.

As part of the project, the Interactors included the Bellavista students in crafting the eco-brick furniture, thereby providing a useful lesson in environmental sustainability. But that was only one facet of the project. Under the guise of la gincana — connection-based games, songs, and activities — the Interactors also conducted social-emotional workshops with the younger students, thereby picking up lessons in leadership and confidence building along the way.



On the steps of the Bellavista school, Rotarians, Interactors, and students display the fruits of their labor — and their newly acquired sense of camaraderie.

As for the relationship between the older and younger students, the Rotary staff duo report that the kids were all happily, well, “interacting.” Mission accomplished.

Peace on earth begins with peace of mind

By Geoffrey Johnson



Photograph by Duncan McGlynn

It was the opening months of the COVID-19 lockdown, and students at Douglas Ewart High School in Newton Stewart, Scotland, were having trouble coping. “They came to us and said they were really struggling with their feelings and their thoughts during the pandemic,” recalls Jean Best. “They wanted to devise a toolkit so that all the youngsters at the school could help themselves.”

Fortunately, Best, who had a long career as a teacher and principal and as one of Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education, was in a position to help the students help themselves. In 2014, at the Rotary International Convention in Sydney, Australia, she and her husband, Keith, had inaugurated a new program called the Peace Advocate Project. Dedicated Rotarians —

today they are members of the Rotary Club of the Hub of Southern Scotland, and Keith is a past governor of District 1020 — the couple wanted to ensure that young people in their community and around the world would be prepared to serve as ambassadors for peace. Working with peace fellows from the Rotary Peace Center at the University of Bradford in England, they designed a program that would help them accomplish just that.

For her efforts, Best was honored in November 2017 when Rotary members gathered at the Palais des Nations in Geneva for Rotary Day at the United Nations. There, she and five other men and women were designated

Rotary People of Action: Champions of Peace. In her remarks to an animated crowd, Best proclaimed, “Without peace in ourselves we will never advance global peace.”

With her focus on individual tranquility as a foundation for world harmony, Best was well equipped to assist the students taxed by the emotional rigors that accompanied the COVID lockdown. As it turned out, the students who reached out to Best were already well positioned to provide the help that they and their peers needed.

“During COVID,” Best explains, “we continued to work over Zoom with our advanced peace advocates at Douglas Ewart. They were concerned because they didn’t know what to do. There was nothing in the school curriculum that trained them to deal with what they were going through. But they also said, ‘If we hadn’t been trained in peace advocacy, things would have been even worse.’”

Working closely with the Bests, and repurposing what they had learned from their Peace Advocate sessions, the students began to assemble their toolkit. “To help everybody else in their school, they put daily posts on their school’s Facebook page about issues like how to talk with parents,” says Jean Best. “All sorts of things came up, and they did it for nearly a year. It was a phenomenal piece of work.”

Best singles out a short video produced by a 16-year-old student. “It was all about the power of the mind and how the mind works,” she says. “This was the piece that most helped students realize how they were reacting to the pandemic. And because it provided hints and tips, the video also showed them what they could do about their problems.”

Jean Best

- Peace Advocate Project, 2014-present
- People of Action: Champion of Peace, 2017
- District 1320 Rotary Peace Fellowships chair, 2024-25

As things began to return to normal, Best assembled the posts and created a new online facet of the Peace Advocate Project. “The students didn’t want to call it a mental health program,” she says. “They wanted it to be known as a self-care program because they maintain that’s what’s necessary for survival. ‘If we can get into the habit of taking care of ourselves,’ they reasoned, ‘then we can start to help other people.’ Which is great, because the Peace Advocate Project is all about helping young people empower themselves.”

That was one of the pluses to the pandemic. There was a downside. As schools shut down, the peace project lost some of its momentum, losing its foothold in a few of the schools where it had established a presence. “Even when the schools were opening up again, we couldn’t get back in because they were so busy catching up,” Best says — and then she puts a positive spin on the situation: “Although COVID was a bit of a step back, it opened a few new doors for us.” As the project reestablished itself in schools in the UK, the pandemic shift to Zoom helped the project expand its reach to other countries, including Australia, Japan, and Mexico.

Best is especially proud of a new online program that linked two schools in Scotland with two schools in Kenya. “We trained all the youngsters at the same time,” she says. “The students in each of the schools could see one another as they worked through the activities. It was all about building bridges between the two countries.”

As the world emerged from its COVID cocoon, Best and her husband continued to expand their project. This year alone they added three new programs, including one that helped secondary school parents learn how to communicate with their children. It was particularly impactful when introduced to Ukrainian parents who had resettled in the UK with their children. “We went through all our peace advocacy techniques on listening and how to get conversations going, and it worked really well,” says Best. “Afterward, one mother came up to us in tears. She said, ‘I can’t thank you enough. I’d lost my son, and because of this, I got him back,’ because now they could hold calm, meaningful, and sustainable conversations.”

As she has in the past, Best continues to introduce her refined approach to thoughtful listening, fruitful conversations, and conflict resolution to other Rotary members for their use in and outside of Rotary. Jane Cooper, the 2024-25 governor of England’s District 1210, praises the work done in her region. “Jean and Keith worked with our district officers and members, and the feedback was excellent,” says Cooper.

In the end, Best stresses the long-term impact of the Peace Advocate Project and where its primary focus remains. “This is a program delivered by young people for young people,” she says. “We strongly believe that once youngsters have been trained in peace advocacy, they will continue to use those skills in the years ahead.”



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