NAYEN Fireside Chat – General Notes

Focus: Student Engagement, Feb. 1, 2026

Introduction

The Rotary Youth Exchange - NAYEN (North American Youth Exchange Network) Fireside Chat serves as a platform for sharing insights, experiences, and updates relevant to youth exchange programs. The following notes capture the main discussion points and ideas from the February 1st Zoom Chat focused on student engagement.

Welcome and Opening Remarks

- Mary Lyn Kagan welcomed attendees from various districts.
- Emphasis on the importance of youth engagement, service projects, promoting cross-cultural understanding and global citizenship.
- Attendees were encouraged to share and discuss thoughts and experiences for student engagement.

The following notes portray the highlights of this Fireside Chat discussion. Along with the ideas, all participants agreed the engagement must be something the students enjoy. Discussing various opportunities with the students and host families, as well as club members, is important towards successful engagement.

Host Club and/or Districtwide Engagement

- Using the District's Service Day to involve students in service project(s) and further relationships with Rotary members.
- With the students, Identify a few potential service projects during one of the Inbound Orientations. What projects have they been involved with at home (via school, church, or other organization?)
- If there are any members with fruit trees, a group of RYE students can help harvest the fruit. A club member can donate the harvest to a local food bank.
- Club members could hold a potluck dinner with the RYE students providing a dessert from their respective country. Host families can be included to promote relationships and support between them and the host club members. By including Host family members, open lines of communication is encouraged and promotes host family sustainability.
- Hold a Trivia Night with questions centered around the countries current RYE students are from. Students can help with the questions used. Could be a minimal cost per attendee (a few dollars). Students could provide dessert from their respective country and Host

families participate. Dollars raised could go to the RYE program's budget to help with local trips or costs for other student experiences.

- Club members can help identify resources available to support students during their exchange – where service opportunities may be. What community events or non-profit events are available for RYE students to promote cultural awareness and the exchange opportunities, i.e Country Fairs, Multi-cultural Fairs, Scouting America – Merit Badge assistance? What district or club member may have local contacts to promote this?
- Club and district members should help recruit RYE committee members to help with suggestions for quality exchange students' engagement in service activities.
- All club service events should be shared with the RYE committee so students can participate when possible.

Students Share Experiences

- Time given to students during a District Conference breakout, Interact trainings, or appropriate event. Stories shared by current and former exchange students about their challenges and successes. Panel type structure. This could be videoed for marketing/public relations use.
- Have a booth with RYE leaders at the District Conference and/or President Elects Training conference. Provide information for incoming Presidents and District leaders so they can help make the most of a RYE student's exchange year.

Looking Ahead

- Plans for upcoming Fireside Chats and networking opportunities.
- Ideas for continued engagement and collaboration within the NAYEN community.
- Invitation for feedback and suggestions for future Fireside Chat focus areas.

The Fireside Chat highlighted the ongoing commitment of Rotary Youth Exchange and NAYEN to empower youth through engagement and their international experiences.

Fireside Chat participants enjoy the "chats" venue and practical ideas shared as we work to enhance RYE programs, NAYEN member alliances and inclusive RYE volunteer and student support.

Watch for more Fireside Chat Zoom opportunities with their focus subject, date and time!

Yours In Rotary,

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