

From Rotary International publication:

A Menu of Service Opportunities—RI Pub. 605B-EN

Population Issues

Rotarians care about the quality of life for all, from the youngest to the oldest, and have sponsored immunization and health programs that have helped to increase longevity. But falling global child mortality rates and climbing lifespans have prompted a new concern: that population growth may outpace earth's ability to sustain development.

In the 30 years between 1969 and 1999, the world's population grew from 3.7 billion to 6 billion people. While the annual rates of growth slowed from 2.4 to 1.3 percent over that same time span, the global population continues to rise by about 78 million a year. United Nations reports provide telling glimpses into population issues:

- The highest population growth rates are generally occurring in the poorest and most environmentally fragile parts of the world.
- The most rapid fertility declines have occurred in developing countries which have achieved major improvements in child survival rates and educational levels and have implemented family planning programs.
- Even if fertility rates everywhere were to fall instantly to replacement level (2.06 children per woman), the high number of youths who are entering reproductive age ensures that world population growth will continue for another two generations
- While there are more young people than ever, there are also more older people; the proportion of people over age 65 worldwide will exceed 17 percent by 2020.

In 1999, the RI board adopted a statement on population growth and sustainable development, which reads in part: "Rotary International encourages Rotary clubs and districts, working as appropriate with government agencies, nongovernmental organizations and local leadership, to increase awareness and undertake even more projects that directly impact population growth and sustainable development. Projects would include those that promote education on the issue of population, access to family health care, adequate nutrition, and enable individuals to make informed and responsible decisions about issues such as child spacing in a way that is in keeping with their personal values and cultural and religious considerations."

Project Ideas

- Conduct or sponsor women's health seminars in the community, focusing on reproductive health, prenatal care, and the benefits of delaying childbearing past adolescence and of spacing children, if appropriate.
- Arrange transportation for underprivileged mothers to attend health clinics and seminars.

- Sponsor a community health fair providing senior citizens a free blood pressure check, eye exam, diabetes screening, and other services.
- Develop a community-awareness campaign aimed at warning young people about the consequences of teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases while promoting self-esteem.
- Sponsor a microcredit program to provide loans to small business entrepreneurs, particularly women.
- Conduct a literacy program focusing on girls, or establish a scholarship fund for girls that would cover the costs of school fees, uniforms, books and other materials.
- Develop child care programs for preschoolers so that their older sisters would be free from babysitting duties to attend school.
- Invite a speaker to educate Rotary club members about population and development from a global perspective.

Project Examples

Promoting child spacing and women's health

Rotary Districts 1860, and 9120, Nigeria, helped implement child spacing in parts of Kaduna State, Nigeria, consistent with the government's national health policy and World Health Organization guidelines. Child Spacing and Family Health Investigation Centers, developed by Nigerian and German Rotary clubs and aided by Rotary Foundation and German government grants, educated families about the benefits of child spacing, which has helped reduce maternal and infant mortality. Workshops educated more than 1,000 doctors, nurses, health care workers, and birth attendants about screening for reproductive tract cancer and child spacing methods. About 500,000 Nigerian women and their families have benefited from the project, which included a massive reproductive health awareness campaign supported by civic and religious leaders. Three years after introduction of the project, the United Nations Population Fund was working with Rotary clubs to replicate the effort throughout Nigeria and Africa.

Improving Maternal and Child Health

Six Rotary Clubs in District 4760 (part of Minas Gerais, Brazil) assisted by local health agencies, District 5280 (California, USA), and a Health, Hunger and Humanity (3-H) Grant established a human milk bank, lactation center, family planning and prenatal care office, and three dental offices, which benefit mothers and children in northern Minas Gerais and southern Bahia states of Brazil. Mothers receive paid transportation to the milk banks to donate their milk and receive education in using natural foods to improve family diets. The project also raised funds to enlarge a community hospital.

Providing free access to integrated Health care

A free medical camp organized by the Rotaract club of Karachi Midtown, Pakistan, provided community residents with tuberculosis scanning in a mobile van, ultrasound facilities, and movies about family planning. Fourteen doctors specializing in eye care, dermatology, gynecology, pediatrics, and general health care contributed their services at the camp. Several pharmaceutical companies

also donated medications. More than 1,000 patients received examinations and treatment for various diseases and conditions.

Helping the aging maintain a high quality of life

In a desire to help overcome a shortage of housing for the oldest residents in its community, the Rotary Club of Fort McMurray, Alberta, Canada, helped establish, Rotary House --- a "supportive housing facility" that fills a void between independent living and long term institutional care. The club raised C\$2.66 million to fund construction of the 40-unit facility, which provides private living space, meals, and other services for each resident, along with common areas for group activities. Residents receive a level of assistance that, in most cases, they wouldn't otherwise be able to afford and a sense of independence by having the option to furnish their own suites.

Making an ongoing commitment to welfare of the aged

Aware that Japan is aging more rapidly than any other country, the Rotary Community Corps of Okayama Chuo conducts three projects benefiting senior citizens: visits to institutions for the aged, communication with the area's aged, and a Symposium on the Aged. Through these projects, seniors have participated in annual sports and dance events at the Okayama Saiseikai Life Care Center. The symposium focuses on topics such as community support for the aging, assisted-living arrangements, and hospice care. Widespread television and newspaper coverage has helped the symposium become a civic learning event that addresses community needs.
