

RECRUITING



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PHILOSOPHY

People with disabilities make up between ten and fifteen percent of the world's total population¹ and should be proportionally represented in international exchange. Individuals with disabilities have important contributions to make toward cross cultural understanding.

The presence and participation of people with disabilities offers other participants opportunities to increase their awareness and appreciation of diversity, and in doing so, broadens and enriches the international experience for all participants.

People with disabilities also have much to gain from work, study and volunteer abroad experiences. Like their non-disabled peers, exchange participants with disabilities are likely to find international experiences to be life-changing experiences, offering opportunities to gain greater understanding of other peoples and cultures, acquire language skills, expand career opportunities and much more. For many people with disabilities, international experiences also offer a range of new challenges and experiences related to accessibility, and opportunities to explore new strategies for independence and inclusion. International exchange participants, with and without disabilities, often return home with an expanded sense of what is possible, a greater willingness to explore new directions and try new experiences, and increased self-confidence to set and achieve life goals.

Many exchange organizations are prioritizing diversity in their exchange programs, and are undertaking outreach efforts aimed at increasing the inclusion of underrepresented groups as participants, volunteers, homestay families and staff members in their organizations.

People with disabilities are also members of other minority and disadvantaged groups. Targeted outreach to any underrepresented community should include welcoming language for people with disabilities.

¹ From UN Standard Rules on Disability

LOOKING BACK, LOOKING FORWARD: THE MEDICAL VS. HUMAN RIGHTS MODEL OF DISABILITY

Historically, people with disabilities have been viewed primarily as patients, subject either to cure or to ongoing medical care. However, during the last 30 years, the conceptualization of disability has been in transition. Two models that illustrate the shift that has taken place in how we think about disability are the medical model and the social or human rights model.

The **medical model** defines disability as a health condition or disease, to be addressed by doctors and rehabilitation specialists who pursue treatments and cures for disabling conditions. The focus is on changing disabled people so they can perform more efficiently in a society that has been constructed by and according to non-disabled people. For example, after the polio epidemics, survivors were encouraged to use crutches and braces to enable them to continue to walk, even in instances where a wheelchair would have provided the individual with greater ease of mobility.

In contrast, the **social model, or human rights model**, focuses on the role of society in gaining equality for all its citizens, including people with disabilities. Within this model, disability is viewed as a social construction, rather than as a medical reality. An individual may have a condition that requires adaptations to the environment, but his or her disability stems from the attitudinal and physical barriers constructed by society. The focus shifts from fixing individuals to eliminating socially constructed barriers that prevent people with disabilities from participating fully in their communities. Equality for people with disabilities is seen in the same light as equality for other minority communities.²

RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES

PROMOTIONAL MESSAGES

Public presentations and program literature should include welcoming, inclusive language. Examples of possible wording include:

- “We encourage people with disabilities and others to apply.”
- “People with disabilities are valued members of our organization.”
- “We provide reasonable accommodations as needed to people with disabilities.”
- “Sign language interpreters available upon request.”
- “Our facilities are wheelchair-accessible.”
- “Our program materials are available in alternative formats (Braille, tape, computer disk, large print, etc.) upon request.”

² From The World Bank: Disability Paradigms and Philosophies

Recruitment materials such as brochures, reports and posters should include images of people with disabilities, and, if possible, stories or quotes by participants with disabilities who have participated successfully.

MEDIA

Some organizations with experience including participants with disabilities have found it useful to solicit stories from the participants and staff involved in the program, and to disseminate their stories through publications, websites, newsletters and other media reaching exchange and disability audiences. Disability-related observations and anecdotes by the participant with the disability may enrich the narrative, and disability-specific information, lessons learned or recommendations may be of particular interest to disability-focused audiences. In general, however, the main focus of stories and articles should be on the exchange experience, not the disability of the individual.

The **Resources** chapter of this manual includes a list of publications that are read by people with disabilities as well as by parents and professionals who work with people with disabilities. Disability organizations, publications and websites should be included on distribution lists for press releases, outreach materials and program information.

SCHOLARSHIPS

Another strategy for increasing diversity among participants is to offer scholarships to members of historically underrepresented communities, particularly those that traditionally have had less access to financial resources. Some exchange programs offer scholarships to qualified people with disabilities, people from ethnic minority groups or to people from low-income communities. Financial assistance is one of the best tools for encouraging the participation of populations usually underrepresented in international exchange.

PEER AND FAMILY CONNECTIONS

Offer to put individuals with disabilities who are considering applying, or who have already been accepted to a program, in touch with alumni with disabilities to provide opportunities to address questions and concerns with a peer who has successfully participated in the program. Some programs connect potential participants with peer mentors through the Internet; others encourage peer support by telephone or

in person. Since family support can make or break a participant's chances of going on an exchange program, some programs offer to foster links between families of applicants and families of returnees. These contacts help parents and other family members feel confident about supporting their child's desire to go abroad.

STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

Creating a position within the organization that focuses on increasing the diversity of staff, administrators, volunteers and program participants, and filling staff positions with qualified individuals who add diversity to the staff, convey the message that the organization values inclusion. Staff members who have disabilities, like people from other minority backgrounds, can bring expertise and perspectives that increase an organization's capacity to be inclusive. A person with a disability on a recruiting committee can provide excellent problem-solving insights and help identify other useful contacts. Another good resource might be a professional who works with people with disabilities, provided he or she has been recommended by members of the disability community as an advocate for equal opportunities. See the **Expanding Practical Knowledge: Recruiting Volunteers and Interns** chapter for ideas on how to contact individuals with disabilities, and non-disabled allies in the community.

Program administrators should foster a commitment to including people with disabilities at all levels of their organizations, and should work with overseas partners and affiliated organizations to provide programs and develop policies that support inclusion. This is especially important when considering compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Please see MIUSA/NCDE's publication *A Practice of Yes: Working with Overseas Partners to Include Students with Disabilities* for strategies for working with partners, and the MIUSA/NCDE publication *Rights and Responsibilities: A Guide to National and International Disability-Related Laws for International Exchange Organizations and Participants* for an in-depth discussion of legal issues.

Finally, disability-inclusive policies must be communicated to all staff members and volunteers in an organization. Interaction with an unsupportive or uninformed staff member can negate otherwise positive recruitment efforts. People who are involved in any aspect of promoting the organization's programs—whether it be answering phones, attending conferences, giving community presentations or any other

public relations activity—should be prepared to answer questions about the program’s policy on including people with disabilities. Exchange programs don’t have to have the answers to every accessibility question that might be asked of them. Most important is to ensure that all staff members and volunteers are prepared to communicate the organization’s commitment to be inclusive of and welcoming to participants with disabilities, and willing to research answers to questions that prospective applicants with disabilities may have. A positive, inclusive attitude is perhaps the best recruitment tool an organization can have.

NETWORKING

Identifying contacts at organizations that are led by and work with people with disabilities is essential to recruiting and accommodating participants with disabilities in international exchange. Local independent living centers, rehabilitation organizations, hospitals, disability rights organizations and support groups can be invaluable sources of knowledge and support. National organizations, like those listed in the **Resources** chapter of this publication, can also serve as excellent recruitment pools. It may be especially effective to form relationships with local, national and international disability-related groups. We suggest networking with the following types of organizations:

SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Develop contacts with special education and adaptive physical education teachers and physical therapists working with disabled youth. These professionals may be able to suggest potential exchange participants or additional community resources. The United States and many other countries have specific schools for people who are Deaf and/or blind. These are excellent places to recruit disabled applicants and homestays.

COLLEGES OR UNIVERSITIES

Most post-secondary institutions in the United States have disabled students’ offices and organizations of students with disabilities. Disabled student programs offer excellent resources for recruiting participants with disabilities for overseas programs, and for recommendations and ideas for including a person with a disability from abroad in a local program. Some colleges and universities, including California State University at Northridge, the University of Illinois at Chicago, the University of California at Berkeley and a number of others have large

disability populations due to disability-related programs offered at those schools. Gallaudet University in the United States is the world's first university for Deaf and hard of hearing students. Consider targeted outreach at these types of schools.

LOCAL SERVICES

Some communities provide paratransit services for people with disabilities who are unable to use public transportation. Most communities also have medical supply stores, sign language interpreting services, wheelchair sales/repair shops and other disability-related businesses and services. Organizations and businesses providing these services may also be able to make referrals to potential participants, or may be willing to post program flyers and brochures.

LOCAL COUNCILS

Many communities have a Mayor's Committee for People with Disabilities or other similar organization. Some communities also have human rights committees or independent disability councils that can serve as resources.

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION CENTERS

Vocational rehabilitation centers assist people with disabilities in reaching educational or employment goals with training, technology and adaptive equipment. These organizations may be able to make referrals to potential participants, or distribute program information to their consumers. Rehabilitation professionals such as occupational or physical therapists may also be able to refer clients to international programs.

DISABILITY-DIRECTED ORGANIZATIONS

Disability-directed organizations, including independent living centers, are often excellent resources for recruiting participants or for information or assistance in addressing access issues. Organizations led by and for people with disabilities often provide information, referrals and services to individuals with disabilities living in the community, as well as self-help, support and advocacy groups. To locate a local independent living center or other self-help organization, consult a local telephone directory or see the **Resources** chapter of this publication.

RECREATION PROGRAMS

Some parks and recreation departments run by city governments sponsor programs for disabled youth and adults. In addition to serving as

COLLABORATION WITH DISABILITY-RELATED OFFICES AND ORGANIZATIONS IS ESSENTIAL FOR EFFECTIVE RECRUITMENT OF PARTICI- PANTS WITH DISABILITIES:

- Offer to provide presentations about the benefits of international exchange at disability organizations, disability-related events and schools for students who are blind or Deaf, and in classes for or that include students with disabilities.
- Promote the importance of international exchange by developing relationships with disability-related organizations in the community and by having representatives of these organizations attend staff meetings periodically, and vice versa, to build staff knowledge on both sides.
- Consider exhibiting at each other's conferences and events.
- Ask disability organizations to circulate announcements and flyers about upcoming exchange programs.
- Request that disability organizations add links from their websites to the exchange organization's website and vice versa.
- Link to Mobility International USA's National Clearinghouse on Disability and Exchange website (www.miusa.org/ncde) to inform potential participants with disabilities of the exchange program's commitment to inclusion.

rich resources for recruiting potential exchange participants, recreation programs offer opportunities and information on other community resources to exchange participants with disabilities living in the United States. See the **Resources** chapter of this publication for more information.

SCREENING

Programs need to be careful, for legal as well as ethical reasons, not to screen out qualified applicants because of their disabilities and perceived limitations. Just as not all non-disabled individuals qualify for particular international programs, not all disabled applicants will meet program requirements. However, exchange programs must provide reasonable and appropriate accommodations to ensure that people with disabilities have fair and equal opportunities to demonstrate their qualifications.

Most international organizations use sophisticated techniques for screening applicants for eligibility and selection. The processes must be accessible for people with disabilities. Reasonable accommodations for screening and selection processes can be explored with applicants before an interview or exam. Discuss what the applicant will need in order to respond effectively in the situation – let the individual describe what will work best for him or her. *IMPORTANT: Remember that it is not appropriate to discuss what accommodations the individual might need to participate in the international program until he or she has been accepted.*

If face-to-face interviews are part of the process, they should be located in a facility that is accessible to people with mobility disabilities.

Accommodations must be provided to make the process accessible for Deaf, hard of hearing, blind or visually impaired applicants. See the **Providing Information in Alternative Formats** chapter for more information.

Organizations should take measures to ensure that selection decisions are based on an accurate assessment of an applicant's qualifications, rather than on impressions and assumptions made by interviewers. For example, an applicant with a speech disability may talk in a manner different from that with which the screeners are familiar. A person with a visual or mobility impairment may not give interviewers the eye contact or postural cues to which they are accustomed.

Applicants with disabilities whose true capabilities do not shine through during the screening process may nevertheless have the potential to be successful in an exchange program.

If the screening process includes proof of foreign language mastery, Deaf applicants may be appropriately excused from showing verbal fluency; applicants with learning or other disabilities may also require adaptations. Be open to exploring different ways of demonstrating language skills depending on the individual's disability.

The National Clearinghouse on Disability and Exchange (NCDE) conducted a survey intended to measure the receptivity of organizations to the participation of people with disabilities in international exchange programs. NCDE's survey consultants, individuals with different disabilities, called the frontline staff of exchange organizations and posed disability-related questions concerning international exchange opportunities based on their own disabilities and interests. Although callers found that international exchange organizations were friendly and courteous, they often lacked the information and resources to provide useful frontline responses or referrals regarding international exchange for people with disabilities.

Callers found that the organizations that provided useful frontline responses did the following:

Brainstormed the possibilities with the caller. Through envisioning the possibilities and providing objective descriptions of the overseas experience, responders demonstrated that the organization was willing to work with the caller, even if the organization did not have experience with or knowledge about accommodating participants with disabilities.

Used a structured form or process. This demonstrated that the organization had been proactive in planning to receive

disability-related questions; while responders may not have had the answers or resources on-hand, there seemed to be reassurance that the organization would be able to obtain the information because the staff member was prepared.

Followed TTY or relay service etiquette. When receiving a call from a hard of hearing or Deaf caller, the responder appeared to have more experience in relating to people who are Deaf. For example, the frontline staff person knew to speak to the caller, not to the relay operator.

Accurately described the services and resources offered by Mobility International USA/ National Clearinghouse on Disability and Exchange.

Instead of suggesting MIUSA/NCDE as a substitute for the programs offered by the exchange organization, frontline staff referred callers to NCDE as a supplement to the offerings of the exchange organization. The appropriateness of the referral showed the callers that the staff member had heard their questions and understood the referral to be a good match.

Exchange organizations can begin to implement some of these practices, while developing readily available information, resources for referrals and firsthand experience to inform positive frontline responses on the inclusion of people with disabilities.

PERSONAL STORY

BUILDING BRIDGES AROUND THE WORLD

by Humberto Gilabert

A dream. It began, like many important things in life — from a dream. How could the Rotary Club in Buenos Aires work to welcome and send Goodwill Ambassadors with disabilities around the world?

That was the first question posed when I returned from the Rotary International Convention in June of 1998. I was highly motivated after hearing a plenary session presented by the staff of the National Clearinghouse on Disability and Exchange (NCDE), a project administered by Mobility International USA (MIUSA) and sponsored by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the United States Department of State. NCDE staff stimulated Rotarians to discover new ways of service in keeping with our institutional ideal of “Service Above Self,” and encouraged us to think about how to include people with disabilities in our programs.

Rotary clubs around the world sponsor many types of international exchanges — from business-related programs to student ambassadorships. Our student programs have served students from all over the world. Rotary youth programs originally served students ages 15 to 19, but in 1997, through the New Generations exchange, Rotary opened the program to young people from 19 to 25 years of age, extending an opportunity for young adults to participate in this life-changing experience.

Each year, we see how international student exchanges, in just a few weeks, can produce important growth in the young participants. They return to us with more confidence, know much more about themselves and understand the world as a common land. They are also proud of acquiring new tools with which to build their lives. I wanted to know how we in Buenos Aires could work to give the same international opportunities to young boys and girls with disabilities.

HOW TO BEGIN? MAYBE WITH A GOOD FRIEND

I read the NCDE journal, *A World Awaits You*, and Rotary information about disability and exchange several times. Then I decided to share it with Salvador Minutella, president of the Rotary Club of Once, Argentina. Salvador is blind and has a particular spirit of service and initiative. Salvador quickly recalled an outgoing, curious and intellectual blind girl, 17-year-old Nerina Russo, who might be interested in an international exchange.

MEETING WITH SCHOOL AUTHORITIES: LEARNING AND MOTIVATING US

As shy but firm beginners, we planned a meeting with Nerina and the authorities of her school. We needed their opinions, knowledge and some help. They agreed to collaborate, and at the end of that meeting Nerina said some words that we will never forget: "I would like to participate in the exchange and become a Goodwill Ambassador, but if I don't, I will be grateful to you, too. Only knowing that Rotary thought that I could represent my country, I've begun to discover that I can do so many things with my life that I never imagined before."

WE NEED A PARTNER! AN INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGE NEEDS TWO COUNTRIES

We investigated different possibilities. I sent an email message to Rotary International and another to NCDE. A third message was sent to Donald Lukich, a Rotarian friend in Leesburg, Florida, who immediately sent almost 100 letters to schools and institutions for blind students.

We quickly received messages from RI and NCDE. They shared with us their experiences and answered all of our questions. We felt sure we were heading in the right direction.

The first partner of our exchange came from one of the letters that Donald Lukich sent. Yvonne S. Howze, the superintendent of the Missouri School for the Blind, proposed that we start our exchange in June 1999. Through the marvel of Internet communication we set up the steps of this first exchange. In Buenos Aires, we would welcome 15-year-old Ronnie Smith and 16-year-old Miguel Renaud, sponsored by the Rotary Club of St. Louis. Nerina and other exchangees were scheduled to be traveling to St. Louis by January 2000.

WELCOME! WE NEED TO BE READY

We planned a four-week program in Argentina, with daily schooling and dynamic social activities. Public and private schools interested in sharing the experience joined with the Buenos Aires Library and the Sports for the Blind Association to participate in and help coordinate the program. Host families and more than fifty foreign and Argentine students listened with great attention to the new program. The community became involved. New energy appeared spontaneously. Young boys and girls taped more than fifty audiocassettes in Spanish and English for other blind students, recording the reports and interesting experiences that our exchange students were sending to us from many countries around the world. Nerina decided to translate the Youth Exchange Manual into Braille. Now, with all of these tools, more students could know about this educational option in the future.

In June 1999, Ronnie arrived and lived like a member of Nerina's family; in January 2000, Nerina was then hosted by his family when she traveled to St. Louis, Missouri for her exchange. Also in June 1999, the Rotary Club of Moron hosted Miguel, providing unforgettable moments with the Pieras and San José Schools.

Miguel said to a local journalist: "I knew almost nothing about Argentina. I thought that it would be like Central America, but it is more European. Now I love this country like my second one. I have a new family and many new friends, and I improved my Spanish a lot. San José School was not for blind students but they received me very well. In the beginning, everyone spoke in English trying to communicate with me. They were very friendly and we had a lot of fun."

LESSONS LEARNED

This fresh experience left us with many lessons:

Work together on international exchanges for students and teachers.

We chose teachers to help us with the selection and training process for disabled students. All of the applicants, with or without disabilities, participated in the selection process together. The system matured and has become more sensitive and inclusive about respecting differences.

Develop procedures for involving the applicants and their families.

Most of the selection and training procedures are taped and the students take these videos home to share with their families. Every exchange

applicant receives materials weekly through email. This information is designed to familiarize potential exchange students with the exchange experience. Their families become more knowledgeable from this communication and regular participation, preparing for the moment when the outbound student is abroad.

Training includes reviewing guidelines, discussing with applicants' families real exchange scenarios, reading participants' essays, and becoming involved in activities such as visiting the sponsoring Rotary Club to speak in public and take pictures with the Club's members. Every two months, we also have a Saturday enrichment session, where students meet for educational and recreational activities. Re-Bounds (outbound students that have returned home) and Inbounds (foreign students) provide most of the organization and coordination for these sessions.

MY CLOSING THOUGHTS

I heard these words in Singapore, spoken by Susan Sygall: "Give the same opportunity to all. Challenge yourself and change the world.®" We wish to continue growing step by step. In June 2000, the 91st Rotary International Convention was held in Argentina, in our district for the first time. As the host district, we received 25,000 Rotarians from all over the world. It was a special opportunity to plant more seeds of the service ideal in our hearts. Let us follow our dreams and build bridges all over the world together!

Humberto Gilabert is a member of Rotary International in Buenos Aires, Argentina. He participated in an exchange program to Syosset, New York in the United States thirty years ago. His daughters have also participated in international programs. Through his experience with international exchange, he has come to value the skills that an international experience can provide.

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OTHER COLLABORATIVE EXAMPLES

The Campus Collaboration Campaign, an initiative of the Association on Higher Education And Disability (AHEAD), NAFSA: Association of International Educators, Mobility International USA (MIUSA) and the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the United States Department of State, asked representatives from education abroad and disabled student services offices at colleges and universities across the United States to meet and collaborate in order to increase cooperative and innovative efforts on campuses. More than 40 schools of higher education participated and broke new ground in bringing together these two campus offices; their exciting and creative ideas range from very simple communication goals to more complex interaction and program design. These suggestions offer many ways to both increase the numbers of students with disabilities in international exchange and to better serve those students already participating. The results of these meetings between the two campus offices have been compiled into a free booklet, available on our website, www.miusa.org or by contacting our office.

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