

# Student exchanges bridge Korea, Netherlands

**Korean adoptee teenager learning about motherland through YFU program**

By Oh Kyu-wook

Roos Bezemer, a Korean-born Dutch student, had always been curious about living in her motherland.

The 18-year-old, adopted when she was 17 months old, came to Seoul in February thanks to Youth For Understanding, a global nonprofit organization promoting international student exchange programs.

With the Korean name of Eunbi, she stays with a host family and attends a women's high school in Seoul and is finding how pleasant it is to be in a different culture.

"I find everything interesting so far, because what seems to be so normal in the Netherlands is really different here," she told The Korea Herald.

"I hope to learn the language and culture, and I hope to have as many experiences as I can to grow as a person."

She is the first member of the exchange program launched last year by YFU branches in both countries.

Bob Poel, the national director of YFU Netherlands, noted that the youth exchange program could have a long-lasting impact on the young students involved.

"If you really (want to) understand why people think differently, I think you have to go and stay there," he said in an interview with The Korea Herald.

The Dutch director visited Seoul last month to better understand the country and to expand the student



Bob Poel (left), the national director of YFU Netherlands, and Roos Bezemer, an 18-year-old Dutch exchange student. YFU

exchanges between the two countries.

He explained that the YFU's exchange programs gave students a unique opportunity to step out of their "comfort zone" and "to start a new in a completely different environment."

YFU's foreign exchange students stay with a local host family and attend a school for either a short-term

or long-term exchange, he said.

The purpose, he added, was to help young people learn the "life of somebody in their age, but in another culture," and to learn about the similarities and differences.

"Also, I think if you want to really value what you have, we need an opportunity to step away from it for some time," he added.

YFU's exchange program was

launched in 1951 by church leaders in Michigan in the U.S. when they invited 75 West German teenagers with the aim of bridging the World War II foes.

Its network has now expanded to 65 countries to become the operator of one of the world's largest international educational exchange programs. There are currently more than 4,000 students participating in

YFU's foreign exchange students stay with a local host family and attend a school for either a short-term or long-term exchange.

"You do not feel completely on your own, because YFU arranges a host family and school for you," he said.

Although nowadays people are becoming increasingly more globalized, the importance of student exchange programs will remain unchanged, he added.

"The world is still divided, not the East and West anymore but because of different religions," he said. "So I think even today our organization has a task to build a bridge to existing differences, to bring the world together."

YFU Netherlands currently organizes short- and long-term exchanges with 38 member countries, including Korea. He said there are currently two Korean teenagers studying in the Netherlands through the exchange program, and three Dutch students will commence their programs here this summer.

"We're very much focused on expanding exchange programs with Asia. We think it is a very important continent already, and will become more important," Poel said. "We hope to not only include more Asian countries, but also to improve the number of Dutch students going to Asia."

Bezemer hopes to be able to speak Korean fluently before finding her biological mother one day.

"I think I'm not ready. But when I do I want to talk with her and understand her," she said.

Poel said she would certainly have some challenges being able to communicate in a foreign language.

"But she'll manage like thousands of other YFU exchange students have done before," he added.

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# 'Korea is key partner in promoting lifelong education'

By Oh Kyu-wook

Korea will play a major role in the UNESCO's plan to build a global network of lifelong learning, according to an adviser to the initiative.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization is currently working to establish a network of cities advanced in lifelong education in October.

"Korean cities will be part of the network and will have the opportunity to show the rest of the world what they're doing," Michael Osborne, professor of adult and lifelong learning at Glasgow University, told The Korea Herald.

The renowned British scholar is one of a group of experts advising the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning regarding its plan to launch the Global Learning Cities Network. He visited Korea this week for an expert meeting on the project.

With human resources the biggest asset of its rapid growth, Korea has already put the system in place for learning through different periods of one's life and careers, he said.

The envisioned network's members will be designated as UNESCO's global learning cities. The aim is to create a global platform and establish a set of benchmarks for other cities to follow in allowing citizens more opportunities to acquire knowledge and skills.

"(When the network is com-



Michael Osborne, professor of adult and lifelong learning at the University of Glasgow. NILE

"learning city," but it doesn't necessarily mean they really are, he said.

"It's very attractive rhetorically to talk about being a learning city, but they need to make sure all the stakeholders are involved and to make sure the learning cities are a meaningful idea."

Osborne has worked with many governments and international agencies, including the Council of Europe and the U.K. and, most recently, German governments.

One of the projects he is currently engaged in is analyzing implications of a survey called the Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies, or PIAAC.

Developed by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the survey is designed to measure adult competencies, such as reading, numeracy, teamwork and communication, he explained.

There are currently 25 countries participating in the survey, including Korea. The first results will be released in October, he said.

"My hypothesis is that countries which put a big emphasis on lifelong education will show the strongest results in PIAAC," he added.

He expects Korea to show a strong showing, noting that it is one of the highly ranked countries in an international student assessment called PISA.

"It'll be interesting to see whether the performance of the countries that do well in PISA is reflected in PIAAC," he added.

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Participants pose during the international forum on lifelong learning at the Gyeonggi Provincial Institute for Lifelong Learning in Suwon on Monday. GILL

## Forum discusses learning throughout lifetime

By Oh Kyu-wook

More than 100 practitioners, academics and policy planners in education discussed how to help people continue learning throughout their lives at an annual forum in Suwon, Gyeonggi Province, Monday.

The forum hosted by the state-run National Institute for Lifelong Education in Korea in cooperation with the Gyeonggi Provincial Institute for Lifelong Learning drew international experts, including Arne Carlsen, director of UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, Michael Osborne, professor of the

University of Glasgow, and Luis Scasso, director of lifelong education at the Organization of Ibero-American States.

Under the theme of "The power of learning cities to change the world," they participated in a series of presentations and discussions on various lifelong learning models in different countries.

"This forum is a unique opportunity to share new ideas and promote international cooperation," Choi Unshil, the president of NILE, said in her opening remarks.

Since 2009, NILE has been hosting the annual forum in an effort to

learn from advanced countries and to help spread best practice in lifelong education around the world.

This year, in particular, the forum was followed by a consultative meeting on Jeju Island for establishing a global network of cities to promote lifelong learning.

The UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning is planning to establish the new initiative in October this year, and before that it plans to make a list of "key features," a set of indicators for monitoring and assessing cities wishing to be part of the network.

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