TOMODACHI NAJAS Grant Program

Narrative Report

Summary

With support from the TOMODACHI NAJAS grant program, the Japan-America Society of Dallas/Fort Worth (JASDFW) organized the Dallas-Sendai Young Ambassadors 2013, a one-week exchange program for a group of nine high school students from Sendai, Japan. The program took place in and around Dallas, Texas, from July 23 to 29, 2013. The Young Ambassadors were accompanied by two chaperones representing SIRA (Sendai International Relations Association), our partner organization in Sendai. The Sendai students, joined by local teens, enjoyed three days of group outings to area highlights, followed by a weekend with their host families. Each student and chaperone stayed with a host family and had a unique experience of American life and Texan culture. The week culminated in a festive farewell picnic with members of JASDFW. The program profoundly affected the lives of hosts and students alike and strengthened bonds of friendship between Sendai and Dallas.

Background

The cities of Dallas and Sendai became International Friendship Cities in August 1997 and pledged “to work together to promote cultural understanding, educational exchange, and economic relations between our two nations.” Over the past 16 years, the two cities have held a variety of cultural, educational, and sports exchanges. Among the first was the Dallas-Sendai Young Ambassadors Program, started in 1998 as an ongoing, though not annual, series of student exchanges. Seven previous trips took place between 1998 and 2009, alternating between cities.

The Young Ambassadors program was temporarily suspended in 2011 because of the economic impact of the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami on Sendai. The largest city near the epicenter of the earthquake, Sendai suffered significant flooding, damage, injury, and loss of life. The TOMODACHI NAJAS grant made it possible for JASDFW and SIRA to resurrect the program and to offer a meaningful and potentially life-changing opportunity for young people whose lives were affected by the 2011 disaster.

The Young Ambassadors

The participants were carefully selected and well prepared for their Texas experience. SIRA publicized the opportunity to all high schools in Sendai. To apply, students were required to submit an application form and a composition describing what the student hoped to learn and how he/she would take advantage of the experience if selected. SIRA received 42 applications, from which 30 students were selected to participate in group interviews. Based on the interviews, nine students were chosen to represent Sendai as Young Ambassadors. The group included six girls and three boys, ages 16 and 17, representing both public and private high schools in Sendai.
SIRA held three orientation meetings with the students during the summer to prepare them for the trip. Topics included:

- The purpose of the program
- History of the friendship city relationship between Sendai and Dallas
- Lecture by a JET Program ALT from Dallas
- Presentations by two 2009 Young Ambassadors from Sendai to Dallas who are now university students
- Group research about the sites they would visit in Texas
- Planning of culture-sharing presentations and activities

The students also attended a party with several Americans from the 2013 Japan-America Grassroots Summit who visited Sendai after the Shimane Summit. The group had several Dallas connections: (1) leader Yoshiko Ando, who had spent two years in Dallas as a JOI (Japan Outreach Initiative) coordinator for JASDFW; (2) Matthew Perry, descendant of Commodore Perry, who had participated in the 2012 Japan-America Grassroots Summit in Dallas/Fort Worth; and (3) Mark Kirby, a recent college graduate from Texas who befriended one of the Sendai boys and later joined the group in Dallas as a volunteer interpreter.

Before departing for Dallas, the Sendai students paid a courtesy visit to Sendai Mayor Emiko Okuyama, who gave them a letter to hand-carry to Dallas Mayor Mike Rawlings.

Itinerary

The Young Ambassadors enjoyed three days of organized group outings, followed by a weekend of activities with host families. The group activities were planned to meet several objectives. A primary goal was to create experiences with depth and meaning beyond sightseeing. We chose to highlight sites of historical significance and new urban development, and to share both the cowboy heritage and contemporary culture of Dallas/Fort Worth. Another objective was to provide opportunities for meaningful interaction with American teens. We arranged for eight local teens to join the group outings and factored in time for reflection and discussion during their busy itinerary.
Day 1: Departure/Arrival
The Young Ambassadors departed Narita International Airport and arrived at Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport on Tuesday, July 23. At Narita, they received VIP treatment from American Airlines, including special AA/TOMODACHI cookies and a group photo with the crew. They also met with two interns from the U.S.-Japan Council, who gave a presentation about the TOMODACHI Initiative. Upon arrival at DFW, they were warmly welcomed by eager host families and JASDFW staff. They all went home with their hosts to relax and get acquainted before three action-packed days.

Day 2: Downtown Dallas
Wednesday was “Downtown Dallas Day,” with an itinerary designed to introduce the city’s thriving urban culture – including history, government, architecture, and parks. The day began with a photo stop at Pioneer Plaza, a bronze re-creation of an Old West cattle drive with longhorn steers and cowboys on horseback. The next stop was the new Klyde Warren Park, a deck park constructed over a major freeway, where the students played games and engaged in team-building activities to “break the ice” between the Japanese and American teens. Next they visited the newly opened and highly acclaimed Perot Museum of Nature and Science and the Sixth Floor Museum, which chronicles the 1963 assassination and legacy of President John F. Kennedy.

In the afternoon, they paid a visit to Dallas City Hall. Dallas City Councilmember Sheffie Kadane, representing Mayor Mike Rawlings, officially welcomed the delegation and proclaimed each member an honorary citizen of the City of Dallas. Honorary Consul-General of Japan John M. Stich joined in the City Hall welcome. Student leader Yuya Yasuda presented Mayor Okuyama’s letter to Councilmember Kadane. The students then toured City Hall and learned about the city government system in Dallas.
Day 3: Fort Worth Stockyards
On Thursday, the group experienced Texas’s western heritage at the Fort Worth Stockyards. They toured the Texas Cowboy Hall of Fame, watched the daily cattle drive of longhorn steers down the middle of the road, bought cowboy hats, and rode horses.

The Honorable J. Thomas Schieffer, former United States Ambassador to Japan and a Fort Worth native, joined the students for lunch at the Star Café. Seated next to the two student leaders, Ambassador Schieffer fielded questions prepared in advance by the students and engaged in lively conversation with them. The Young Ambassadors presented Ambassador Schieffer with a Sendai-Dallas Young Ambassadors 2013 t-shirt designed by one of their members.

Then, wearing their newly purchased cowboy hats, the Sendai students enjoyed a hot and dusty Texas trail ride on horseback.

The hour-long bus rides between Dallas and Fort Worth allowed time for guided interaction among students. On the way to Fort Worth, the Sendai students quizzed the American students about Sendai and Japan, with fans and chopsticks as prizes for those who got the correct answers, and JASDFW volunteers led a Dallas/Texas quiz. On the return trip, the students took turns sharing one new experience and one fact they had learned about the other culture.

Day 4: Southern Methodist University
Friday’s itinerary on the campus of Southern Methodist University was planned to give the Young Ambassadors a university experience and encourage study abroad after graduation from high school. SMU is also home to the newly opened George W. Bush Presidential Center, which offered an opportunity to learn about recent U.S. presidential history. The group spent the morning at the Bush Center, where they were given a special briefing about the U.S. presidency, visited the reconstructed White House situation room, and viewed the public exhibits.

Following lunch at SMU’s student cafeteria, they enjoyed a campus tour and met with Dr. William M. Tsutsui, Dean of SMU’s Dedman College of Humanities and Sciences and a member of the U.S.-Japan Council. Dean Tsutsui gave each student an SMU pennant and a pair of Dedman College souvenir sunglasses and invited them all to come back in a few years as SMU students. They finished the day cooling off at Pokey-O’s Cookies & Ice Cream, where they created their own combination of a classic American treat.
Days 5 & 6: Homestay Experience

Students spent evenings and Saturday and Sunday with their host families, experiencing American daily life and activities with family and friends. Family-planned activities included a Texas Rangers baseball game, the Mesquite Championship Rodeo, Medieval Times Dinner & Tournament, Six Flags over Texas, Segway tours, backyard barbecues, swimming, cooking, shopping, and canoeing at White Rock Lake. Many of the Sendai students cooked Japanese meals for their host families. We asked the hosts to tell us about some of their favorite activities with their Japanese guests:

*Southern Junction is a great place. We cooked our own steak on a big open grill and later they taught country dance lessons. Everyone joined in to learn line dancing.*

*Gabrielle, Yuka and Issac baked candied-eyes cupcakes . . . Yuka said she had never baked before.*

*The most fun thing that we did with our student was going to a concert with him. It was the student’s first time at a concert of any kind and it was very exciting for him.*

*Videos and pictures she showed us about her family, school, and community . . . opened up conversations that allowed us to learn more about each other as people and our families.*

*Learning about her love of American pop music and sharing our music library with her was really fun. . . . She tried to teach us Japanese and we tried to teach her Hindi! It went pretty well till the time we actually had to use it. This whole exercise gave us many hours of merriment – during and after.*

Day 6: Farewell party

The climax of the week was Sunday evening’s “Picnic in the Park” at Flag Pole Hill in Dallas. The farewell event was attended by the Sendai delegation, host families, JASDFW members, and local representatives of Hitachi, a TOMODACHI supporter. The party was a blend of cultures, with Texas
barbecue, Dallas-Sendai cakes, cowboy hats, and yukata. This was an occasion for the Sendai students to share their culture and express appreciation to their Dallas friends. The Sendai Young Ambassadors led the crowd in a sing-along of “Sukiyaki” and “If you’re happy and you know it,” distributed small gifts and snacks to the guests, and gave heartfelt speeches about how much their Texas experience had meant to them.

**Day 7 - Departure**

Tears were shed as students and hosts made their final farewells early Monday morning. Local employees of American Airlines were on hand at the airport to greet the students and escort them through check-in and security clearance. Everyone had figured out that the best way to pack a cowboy hat is to wear it!

**Impact on Students**

Following their return to Sendai, the students and chaperones met to prepare content for the final report book, which will be finished after they receive host family answers to a questionnaire. In addition, they reported about the Young Ambassador Program at the Sendai World Festa on September 15. They talked about their homestay experience, the facilities they visited, Dallas City Hall, and what they learned through this program.

In their written reports, the students all said that experiencing a different culture firsthand was an invaluable experience, and many want to use it to contribute to Dallas-Sendai and Japan-U.S. friendship in the future. Most are staying in touch with their host families via Facebook and email. Below are
several translated excerpts that convey the importance of this program to their lives. A complete set of the students’ written reports in Japanese is included as an addendum to this report.

On Participating in this Program

Yuka Iwabuchi

One of the reasons why I participated in this Dallas Youth Delegation was that I wanted to get a job in the future that serves as a continuous bridge of friendship between U.S. and Japan. This experience has strengthened my desire to actually go to the U.S. and do international work. I want to improve my language skills further, actively participate in interactions with foreigners, and progress toward my dream by utilizing the experience I learned from this program.

Quote from Homestay Experience

Rino Kobayashi

Communicating the earthquake disaster was my number one purpose. I was able to explain the disaster situation to my host family well because I have brought a book on the disaster and had thought about how I would explain it. They appeared not well informed of the disaster and were all shocked. I am glad they know the situation now. I want to do my part to further improve the good relationship between the city of Dallas and city of Sendai.

Quote from Homestay Experience

Kotaro Obara

On returning to Sendai I wanted to tell about my experience in Dallas at the elementary and junior high schools in my hometown. I consider it to be my responsibility after participating in this TOMODACHI project. I want my juniors in school to have interest in the U.S. and Dallas. I also want them to be interested in other sister cities and countries.

Quote from Homestay Experience Story

Rina Nishikibe

Tori has taught me a lot about American culture. I realized through my homestay that I need to know more about Japan. There are many things that I thought I knew but actually did not. I realized that it is essential for international exchange to really know your country. I also felt that American people have their own opinions. It is often said that Japanese people just follow other people’s opinion, but I realized it is really true. The time I’ve spent as a member of the Proctor family has become an enjoyable and invaluable experience that I will never forget through my life.

Quote from “My Second Family”

Yuka Iwabuchi

Thanks to my host family, I was able to meet many American people and make four American friends of my generation in one short week. I want to continue our exchanges through mail and letters. I am grateful that I was able to meet a wonderful host family who was willing to accept me, and I want to continue the relationship. My host sister smilingly said to me “I have already decided to go to Japan next year on a similar program as Yuka’s”. I think it would be wonderful to meet Gabrielle in Japan next time!! I love the Earley family!!
Local Participants

The Hosts
Eleven host families opened their homes to the Sendai visitors for six nights and gave them a taste of everyday life in America. Host families represented American diversity and a wide geographic area around Dallas – Coppell, Fort Worth, Irving, Keller, Lewisville, Plano, Southlake, and Sunnyvale. They included JASDFW’s summer intern, an international studies/Japanese studies major at Earlham College; three JASDFW Board members; individual members; and employees of five corporate members – American Airlines, Fujitsu Network Communications, NEC Corporation of America, ORIX USA Corporation, and SMU’s John Goodwin Tower Center for Political Studies.

American Students
Eight American students – from host families and other JASDFW members – joined the Sendai students on their group outings to further cultural exchange. The Japanese and American teens interacted one-on-one through team-building activities and informal time together on the bus and at lunchtime. They learned about each other’s cities through Dallas-Sendai games and quizzes, and they shared their personal thoughts and perspectives during planned “reflection time.”

Observations
The American participants took away a variety of observations from the hosting experience. Most commented on the politeness of their guests. Below are some comments from hosts about their cultural exchange experience:

I was surprised to learn that Mayu attended a Catholic High School. I didn’t know Sendai had a Catholic High School. Another interesting thing about her school is that the students are required to go directly home after school. No stopping off for shopping or Starbucks. I think we could use that here in the U.S.

Rino recounted the harrowing time they had to undergo during the tsunami. . . . What was impressive was, despite the magnitude of their struggle, their stoic acceptance.

We learned about their education system, its rigor and the focus on environmental education. Overall, it seems Japanese are lot more in contact with the surroundings.

We learned that Sendai has a beautiful festival of lights that is visited by people from all over Japan.

We really enjoyed hosting Aoi, as well as driving her and other exchange students to and back from their daily events. It was a chance to talk and hear about their views of U.S. society.

As soon as you began engaging, you soon determined we’re really all alike more than we are different. It positively impacted our family because we worked as a team, strategically, in all of our preparations to deliver a warm and loving environment to Yuka!

2014 Dallas-Sendai Young Ambassadors
The TOMODACHI NAPAS grant will enable JASDFW and SIRA to hold the Dallas-Sendai Young Ambassadors program in two consecutive years. This continuity will create reciprocal opportunities
between families and momentum for future years. In June-July 2014, the program will reverse direction, and approximately nine Dallas-area students will travel to Sendai. Several youth who participated this year plan to apply in 2014. JASDFW will announce the opportunity to Dallas/Fort Worth students in January 2014 and begin the selection process soon thereafter.

**Organization and Support**
Dallas-Sendai Young Ambassadors 2013 is part of the TOMODACHI NAJAS Exchange Program, which is made possible through generous contributions from Mitsubishi Corporation, Toyota Motor Corporation, and Hitachi, Ltd.

The program was organized and administered locally by JASDFW staff and Board member Mark Berry, chair of the Dallas-Sendai Committee. SIRA organized and administered Sendai’s participation and chaperoned the students.

The City of Dallas’ Protocol Office made all arrangements for activities in downtown Dallas and the official welcome at City Hall. American Airlines’ Tokyo office, headed by former JASDFW Board member Erwan Perhirin, provided valuable assistance with ticketing and departure from Narita, and local American Airlines employees assisted with the group’s departure from DFW. Five individuals, both Japanese and American, supported the program as volunteer interpreters and photographers.

The U.S.-Japan Council provided assistance at Narita Airport, and two distinguished individuals affiliated with the USJC, Ambassador Schieffer and Dean Tsutsui, spent time with the students and greatly enhanced their experience.

**Significance to JASDFW**
Dallas-Sendai Young Ambassadors is a significant program for JASDFW for a number of reasons. It supports a major goal of our strategic plan – to increase opportunities for DFW residents to experience U.S.-Japan cross-cultural exchange. It also meets our objective to expand the breadth of the Dallas-Sendai relationship beyond JASDFW to other individuals and organizations. The 2013 host families represented eight cities and five companies or organizations in the Dallas/Fort Worth area. Moreover, the Young Ambassadors program cultivates youth of both countries as future stewards of the Dallas-Sendai relationship and the U.S.-Japan relationship – a critical need described eloquently by Mark Davidson of the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo at the 2013 NAJAS annual meeting in Pittsburgh.

**Attachments**
- Itinerary
- Student Reports
- Photos (sent separately)
Dallas-Sendai Young Ambassadors 2013  
Itinerary

**Day 1: Tuesday, July 23, 2013**
Depart from Japan; arrive in DFW
- ANA #3232, departing Sendai 8:05 am on 7/23/13
- AA #176, departing Narita 11:30 am, arriving DFW 9:15 am on 7/23/13
Afternoon schedule TBD
Dinner and overnight with host families

**Day 2: Wednesday, July 24, 2013**
Visit to Dallas City Hall and downtown sightseeing:
- Lunch: El Corazon de Tejas
- Dallas City Hall: Meeting with Dallas City Councilmember Sheffie Kadane and Honorary Consul-General John M. Stich; delivery of letter from Mayor Okuyama of Sendai for Mayor Mike Rawlings
Evening and overnight with host families

**Day 3: Thursday, July 25, 2013**
Western day in Fort Worth Stockyards:
- Texas Cowboy Hall of Fame  [http://www.texascowboyhalloffame.org/](http://www.texascowboyhalloffame.org/)
- Shopping at Stockyards Station  [http://fortworthstockyards.org/Shopping.aspx](http://fortworthstockyards.org/Shopping.aspx)
- Reflection Time at JASDFW office
Evening and overnight with host families

**Day 4: Friday, July 26, 2013**
Visit Southern Methodist University campus:
- Lunch: SMU Cafeteria
- SMU campus tour  [http://www.smu.edu/AboutSMU](http://www.smu.edu/AboutSMU)
- Meeting with Dean Bill Tsutsui, Dedman School of Humanities & Sciences, SMU
- Mid-Afternoon: Pokey-O’s Cookies & Ice Cream  [http://www.pokeyos.com/hours_locations.html](http://www.pokeyos.com/hours_locations.html)
Evening and weekend with host families

**Day 5: Saturday, July 27, 2013**
Host family activities
Overnight with host families
Day 6: Sunday, July 28, 2013
Host family activities
5:00-8:00 pm – Farewell Party at Flag Pole Hill, Dallas – Outdoor picnic with host families and JASDFW members
Overnight with host families

Day 7: Monday, July 29, 2013
Depart from DFW
  • AA #175, departing DFW 11:00 am on 7/29/13

Day 8: Tuesday, July 30, 2013
Arrive in Japan
  • AA #175, arriving Narita 1:55 pm on 7/30/13
  • ANA #3235, departing Narita 6:55 pm on 7/30/13

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