Fukushima Youth Cultural Exchange Program

FINAL REPORT
TOMODACHI–NAJAS Grassroots Exchange Program
July 20–30, 2014

Funded by TOMODACHI’s Fund for Exchanges through generous contributions from

Toyota Motor Corporation
Mitsubishi Corporation
Hitachi, Ltd.

JAPAN AMERICA SOCIETY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

In partnership with

DELTA

Living Dreams Japan

Los Angeles-Nagoya Sister City Affiliation

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Thanks to generous contributions to the TOMODACHI Fund for Exchanges by Toyota Motor Corporation, Mitsubishi Corporation, and Hitachi, Ltd., eight children from Fukushima Aiikuen children's home (orphanage) were “pioneers” as only the second delegation of residents to travel abroad in the home’s 121-year history.

The eight children, along with their chaperone, visited Los Angeles from July 20 to July 30, 2014. The experience was life-changing for the Japanese children, as well as for the American host families and volunteers.

We thank the US-Japan Council and the National Association of Japan-America Societies for collaborating to make possible the TOMODACHI–NAJAS Grassroots Exchange Program and its support for the Fukushima Youth Cultural Exchange Program (FYCEP). Special thanks is also extended to Delta Air Lines for serving as the official airline for the exchange.

We also thank our partners, Living Dreams in Japan and the Los Angeles–Nagoya Sister City Affiliation, for their support.

PLEASE NOTE — At the request from the director, staff and even the children of Fukushima Aiikuen, we ask no photos --where a child’s face can be clearly recognized-- from this report be posted on the internet. This is for the safety and future well-being of the children. Thank you for your understanding.
Quotes from Supporters of Fukushima Youth Cultural Exchange Program

Thank you for the lovely Welcome Reception for the Fukushima children! It was so beautiful in Palos Verdes and the friendly atmosphere added so much to making the afternoon a very special day to welcome the children! ~ You have so many volunteers, and we are all so happy to have this opportunity to be a part of this wonderful program. I feel very humbled and blessed to meet these children. They are an inspiration to me with their strength and hopefulness.

— June Aochi Berk, FYCEP Committee and Volunteer

It was a pleasure having your group at the farm. I hope that they had a memorable time. If you think it is worthwhile, would be more than happy to host again. Best of luck to the children of Fukushima Aiikuen.

— Glenn Tanaka, Tanaka Farms

It was really our pleasure to host the delegation. It is what the Science Center is here for, creating experiences and giving back. Especially for your group from Fukushima Aiikuen who have additional life challenges one can only imagine.

— Patrick Love, California Science Center

I was deeply impressed with all you are doing for the children from Fukushima Aiikuen. We will push our editor to make space in our magazine to share the TOMODACHI-NAJAS Grassroots Exchange Program.

— Noriko Ozzie, Staff Writer, Little Tokyo Guide (J-Town Guide)

Thank you for everything you have done and continue to do for Fukushima Aiikuen. It was very touching and emotional to see how important this is for both the host families and for the students themselves. I know it’s a tremendous amount of work to prepare for these 10 days, but it’s amazing to see what a lifelong impact this has and will continue to have on each and every one of the students.

— Veronica Anderson, Volunteer Diver, Aquarium of the Pacific

Working on and implementing this exchange program has been the most meaningful and fulfilling experience in my twenty-one years at JASSC.

— Douglas Erber, President, JASSC
Background about the Fukushima Youth Cultural Exchange Program

There are 585 children’s homes (“orphanages”) in Japan. Nineteen of these children’s homes are located in Tohoku, the region most severely affected by the March 11, 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami.

The Japan America Society of Southern California (JASSC) has developed a close relationship with the children and staff of the largest of these Tohoku children’s homes — Fukushima Aikuen (FA), located outside the evacuation zone of the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant. In September 2011, JASSC made a tranche from its 2011 Japan Relief Fund to “adopt” FA, which is home to 92 children, ages 2 to 18, all of whom are affected daily by the nuclear radiation crisis.

Funds provided by JASSC were used to purchase music instruments, tea ceremony sets, tumbling mats, building blocks, telescopes and other items that allow the children to remain active indoors; two portable generators were also acquired so FA can prepare meals in the event of electricity blackouts. Two additional tranches from the 2011 Japan Relief Fund were made to support educational field trips for FA children. A fourth tranche was made to replace an aging vehicle used to transport kindergarten aged children to school, as well as take children to doctor’s appointments (Like other children’s homes in Japan, approximately 30% of FA children have a developmental disability). All funds are delivered through Smiles & Dreams: Tohoku Kids Support Project which is managed by Living Dreams, a recognized Japanese NPO with a mission to support children’s homes in Japan.

FA provides a safe, caring and clean environment for its children, but like all children’s homes in Japan, it falls short in addressing finer issues. Most of the children still lack the guidance, skills and tools needed to encourage them to pursue a better life. They are trapped in a life that will be mediocre, at best. Furthermore, the FA children have the added burden of worrying about the serious health issues that could arise from radiation exposure.

An additional challenge is FA’s extremely limited budget. The first priority is to feed and clothe the children. The next priority is to maintain the homes’ facilities. There are no funds available for extra supplies, such as the items FA purchased with funds from JASSC 2011 Japan Relief Fund, nor are there funds for extracurricular activities.

To help FA children overcome some of these challenges, JASSC proposed an unprecedented U.S.-Japan grassroots exchange opportunity, the “Fukushima Youth Cultural Exchange Program.” The exchange program was managed by JASSC, in partnership with Living Dreams in Japan and with the Los Angeles-Nagoya Sister City Affiliation (LANSCA) in Los Angeles.

With a grant from the TOMODACHI–NAJAS Grassroots Exchange Program, made possible by generous donations by Toyota Motor Corporation, Mitsubishi Corporation, and Hitachi, Ltd., eight children, aged 14 to 18 and accompanied by an FA staff member serving as chaperone, visited Los Angeles in from July 20 to July 30, 2014.
Thank You to TOMODACHI–NAJAS for Granting our Request

The Fukushima Youth Cultural Exchange Program is unique in that it provides a life-changing cultural experience for children that would otherwise not have the financial means – from FA or family – to participate in an international exchange. For this reason, we thank the TOMODACHI–NAJAS Grassroots Exchange Program for granting two special requests.

First, because Fukushima Aiikuen does not have the space or resources to host a delegation of American children, we made a special request this exchange not be reciprocal. Instead, we would bring a delegation from Fukushima Aiikuen in summer 2013 and 2014.

Second, since roundtrip airfare from Japan to Los Angeles is less than the generous amount provided by the grant, we allocated a portion of the unused airfare to cover the expenses for the FA children to travel roundtrip from FA children’s home to Narita Airport. Additionally, we allocated a portion of the unused airfare to cover the expenses for the FA delegation’s passport fees, travel insurance, suitcases and other items required of any Japanese making a first-time visit to the United States.

Goals and Objectives

Based on feedback from last year’s successful Fukushima Youth Cultural Exchange Program, some changes we made to improve this year’s exchange included –

1. Additional opportunities to meet with American youth.
2. Less planned activities and more time with Host Families, especially at dinnertime

The Fukushima Youth Cultural Exchange Program met its goals and objectives of providing a life-changing experience for FA children, who otherwise have no financial means to participate and benefit from international cultural exchange activities. It positively affected the lives of FA children by planting the seeds of international understanding, particularly concerning the U.S.-Japan relationship. It was also made available without tapping into FA’s extremely limited budget.

The children enjoyed the experience of living in the U.S. with an American family. We placed two FA children per Host Family as a “buddy system” to facilitate communication and provide a level of comfort in surroundings that are completely new and unfamiliar.

Additionally, we worked to ensure the FA children have extensive contact with Americans though social and sightseeing activities, along with exposure to American culture and values. They interacted and shared experiences with American children and were presented opportunities to learn about the history and contributions of Japanese Americans.

Through these activities, we provided a mental and physical break from their lives in Japan. They returned home refreshed and filled with lessons that will inspire them to become successful and contributing members of their communities. The program also established solid personal connections between the youth of Fukushima and Los Angeles.

Finally, the Fukushima Youth Cultural Exchange Program will serve as a prototype for other potential U.S.-Japan exchange programs benefiting orphans in Tohoku children’s homes.

Overall, this year’s exchange was a resounding success. The consensus of the JASSC Board of Directors, Staff and FYCEP Volunteers and Supporters is to do everything possible to ensure the continuation of this important, life-changing exchange program.
2014 FYCEP Itinerary

**Sunday, July 20**

- 3:45pm  Depart Narita – Delta Air Lines #284
- 9:50am   Arrival at LAX, go to Host Families’ homes
- 4:00pm   TOMODACHI Orientation by USJC Hiroyo Nonoyama
- 5:00-7:30pm Welcome Reception - Generously hosted by Ninoska and William French and featuring Ramen Burger®

Welcome to Los Angeles!

TOMODACHI Orientation presentation by USJC’s Hiroyo Nonoyama

After the TOMODACHI Orientation, each student gave English self-introductions at the Welcome Reception. They were joined by USJC Co-Chairman Henry Ota, JASSC President Doug Erber, and JASSC Chairman-Elect, Joseph Portillo.
Monday, July 21

10:00am  LAFD San Pedro station tour and fire boat ride
12:00pm  Tonkatsu lunch with firefighters
2:00pm-4:30pm  “Backstage Tour” of Aquarium of the Pacific
Dinner with Host Families

LAFD San Pedro station tour and fire boat ride

Aquarium of the Pacific “Backstage Tour”
Tuesday, July 22 10:00am-3:00pm

Beach Day in Huntington Beach – *surfing lessons, volleyball, Frisbee, cooking hotdogs and s’mores – Local high school students invited to join*

Dinner with Host Families

**Image**

*Walking Tour of Little Tokyo*

**Image**

*Visit to Sakura Trees dedicated to Fukushima Aiikuen in 2013*

**Image**

*Dr. Greg Kimura, CEO of JANM, welcomes the delegation*

**Image**

*Sashimi and Potluck Lunch with JANM Volunteers!*

Wednesday, July 23 10:00am

Little Tokyo walking tour, *including visits to Go For Broke Monument and Sakura Trees dedicated in 2013 to FA*

JANM tour and sashimi lunch with volunteers

Visit to Hollywood

Poolside Reception at CG Residence

Inspirational Talk with Actor Shin Koyamada

**Image**

*Little Tokyo walking tour, including visits to Go For Broke Monument and Sakura Trees dedicated in 2013 to FA*

**Image**

*JANM tour and sashimi lunch with volunteers*

**Image**

*Visit to Hollywood*

**Image**

*Poolside Reception at CG Residence*

**Image**

*Inspirational Talk with Actor Shin Koyamada*
Poolside Party at the Consul General’s Official Residence

Acting Consul General Suga greets the TOMODACHI Children

The Consulate General of Japan generously provided plenty of delicious food!

TV and film actor, Shin Koyamada (Last Samurai), led an inspirational discussion with the TOMODACHI children. Koyamada has made several US State Dept. tours of Japan to inspire Japanese students to study in the United States. The chaperone from Fukushima Aiikuen was extremely pleased with the positive and strong lessons Koyamada share based on his own life.
Thursday, July 24  
11:00am-12:00pm  
USC Campus Tour  
12:00pm-1:00pm  
Lunch at USC Food Court  
1:30pm -3:00pm  
Guided Tour of Endeavour Space Shuttle, CSC  
Dinner with Host Families

Tour of University of Southern California  
Space Shuttle Endeavor at California Science Center

Friday, July 25  
Free Day with Host Families

Saturday, July 26  
9:00am-12:30pm  
“Cookout Tour” and lunch with TOMODACHI-MUFG at Tanaka Farms, famous Japanese American authentic working farm.  
2:00pm  
Tour of Harbour Surfboards, world’s oldest surfboard production store - intro to how surfboards are made  
6:00pm  
Angels vs. Tigers baseball game at Angel Stadium

“Cookout Tour” of the famous Tanaka Farms. We were pleased to join the delegation of TOMODACHI-MUFG students, as well as high school age members of the Orange County Optimists.
Angels vs. Tigers game at Angel Stadium. Angels won 4 – 0!

Sunday, July 27
AM – 5:00pm Free time with Host Families
5:30pm “Mata Ne” Reception

Mata Ne Reception with Host Families and Supporters

Monday, July 28
9:00am-10:00pm Disneyland!
Tuesday, July 29  Free day with Host Families

On July 29, several Host Families opted to visit The US Open of Surfing at the Huntington Beach Pier.

Wednesday, July 30  1:45pm flight home  4:45pm (July 31) Delta Air Lines #283  Arrive Narita, Japan

After a tearful send off at Los Angeles International Airport, the TOMODACHI-NAJAS “FYCEP”s” Delta Air Lines flight takes off from LAX for Tokyo.
Immediate Benefits of the Fukushima Youth Cultural Exchange Program

In 2013, we learned the exchange program had a positive impact at FA, even for the children who did not participate. Based on age, there were 30 children eligible to participate. From this pool, 20 raised their hands when asked if they wanted to visit the U.S. To help select the final eight participants, FA staff reviewed report cards for those with the top scores in English. The 12 children not selected began studying English harder!

The 2013 exchange’s eight children and chaperone gave a two-hour presentation and Q&A session with the younger children at FA. The result is all the children now hope to visit the US someday, with the TOMODACHI–NAJAS Grassroots Exchange Program, or by other means. The 2014 exchange participants will give a similar presentation.

On September 11, 2014, as part of a JASSC’s Goodwill Tour Through Tohoku, a 16-member delegation visited Fukushima Aiikuen. The members of the tour included ~

  Terry S. Hara, Chairman, JASSC and Member, USCJ
  Joseph C. Portillo, Co-Vice Chairman / Chairman-Elect, JASSC
  Edward Perron, Chairman Emeritus, JASSC
  Douglas Erber, President, JASSC
  Two members of the JASSC Board of Directors
  Three members of the JASSC Board of Governors
  Seven prominent members of JASSC

During the visit, we spoke with Fukushima Aiikuen’s Director, Mr. Hisao Saito. He reported a similar fact shared by the chaperone (page 3 of this report). Specifically, in the three decades Mr. Saito has worked at Fukushima Aiikuen, no project or programs have had the same positive influence on the children as the TOMODACHI-NAJAS Grassroots Exchange Program. Saito added, “The children from the delegation have a new poise, maturity and confidence they lacked prior to the exchange”. He thanked everyone involved to make the Fukushima Youth Cultural Exchange Program possible.

Today, every child at FA hopes to visit the US, and the exchange participants want to visit US again. They also want to play some role in the US-Japan relationship.

Lessons Learned

For the exchange this year, we wanted to increase opportunities to meet with US-Japan Council members, especially with the US–Japan Council’s Emerging Leaders. We were pleased several USJC leaders and members attended the Welcome and “Mata Ne” receptions.

We were also pleased to join the large delegation participating in the 3rd TOMODACHI-MUFG International Exchange Program. Our TOMODACHI-NAJAS and the TOMODACHI-MUFG participants both enjoyed a special “Cook Out” visit to Tanaka Farms. It was a good opportunity for all the children to meet each other.

The most asked question among all involved is, “How can we continue to support and engage the children after they return to the children’s home, and do so in a sustainable and affordable way?” The FYCEP Committee and JASSC staff look forward to working with USJC to address this important issue.

Meantime, we simply cannot thank TOMODACHI enough for making this exchange possible!
Special Appreciation and Acknowledgment

Airline Sponsor
Delta Air Lines

Welcome Reception Sponsors
Ninoska and William French
Ramen Burger®

“Mata Ne” Reception Sponsor
Rikiko Kubo Family

Special Interpreter
Isis Kubo

Generous Financial Supporters
Tammie Kanda
Rikiko Kubo Family
Henry Ota

Pro Bono Representation provided by
Seyfarth Shaw LLP

Host Families

Mieko and Douglas Erber, and Ryan (7) and Katie (6)
Host Family of Haruka Iino and Narumi Iwase

Frances and Mickey Matsumoto, and Brandon (20), Jay (17) and Paige (15)
Host Family of Tomohiro Kuroki and Mao Arakida

Yumi and Douglas Montgomery, and Alec (6)
Host Family of Chihiro Iwasaki and Yuma Ujiie

Ellyn Iwata, and Warren (23), Derek (21) and Jason (16)
Host Family of Nene Hashimoto and Yasuaki Suzuki

Carmen and George Erber
Host Family of Yoshikuni “Yoshi” Endo, Chaperone

Special Host Family and Exchange Program Participants
Rikiko Kubo Family
Special Activities’ Sponsors (Listed in chronological order)

Welcome Reception
Ninoska and William French
Jeffrey Shimamoto
Ramen Burger®
Henry Ota, Vice Chairman, US–Japan Council
Curtiss Takada Rooks, Member, JASSC Board of Governors and Member, US–Japan Council
Kay Amano, “FYCEP Angel”
June Aochi Berk, “FYCEP Angel”
Tammie Kanda, “FYCEP Angel”

Los Angeles Fire Department, Station Tour, Fireboat Excursion and Lunch
Deputy Chief David Yamahata (Ret.), Emergency Operations Commander
Paige Matsumoto, Firefighter / Paramedic (and excellent cook!)
Tammie Kanda, FYCEP Committee

Aquarium of the Pacific - Behind the Scenes Tour
Jerry Schubel, President
Perry Hampton, Vice President of Husbandry
Veronica Anderson, Volunteer Diver
MJ Suzuki, Volunteer Diver

Day at the Beach
Ellyn Iwata
Jason Yamashita

Japanese American National Museum - Tour and Docent & Volunteer Sashimi Luncheon
Greg Kimura, President and CEO, JANM
June Aochi Berk, FYCEP Committee and Volunteer
Azumako Tremayne, Special Coordinating Volunteer and Docent, JANM
JANM Docents, especially June Aoki, Yae Aihara and May Fujino
JANM Volunteers

Sakura Trees Dedication at the MTA Little Tokyo/Arts District Station
Thomas O’Kelly – “Save the Sakura Trees Project”
June Aochi Berk, FYCEP Committee and Volunteer
Ann Kerman, Interim Director, Constituent Programs at LA Metro
Tanner Blackman, Planning Director, Office of LA Councilmember Jose Huizar
Little Tokyo Community Council – Beautification Committee
Japanese Chamber of Commerce of Southern California
Higashi Honganji Buddhist Temple

Poolside BBQ Reception
The Honorable Masahiro Suga, Acting Consul General of Japan
Consulate General of Japan in Los Angeles

Inspirational Conversation for the FYCEP Exchange Participants
Shin Koyamada, JASSC Special Ambassador. TV and Movie Actor and Producer.
University of Southern California – Guided Tour and Lunch  
Grace A. Shiba, Senior Director of Alumni Relations  
Tammie Kanda, FYCEP Committee and Sponsor  
Isis Kubo, Interpreter

Tour of Endeavour Space Shuttle at California Science Center  
William T. Harris, Senior Vice President of Development and Marketing, CSC  
Patrick Love, Executive Assistant, CSC  
Tammie Kanda, FYCEP Committee and Sponsor  
Isis Kubo, Interpreter

Cookout Tour and BBQ Lunch at Tanaka Farms  
Glenn Tanaka  
Tanaka Family  
Yuko Kaifu, Member, US-Japan Council  
3rd TOMODACHI-MUFG International Exchange Program

Harbour Surfboards – Tour of the one of the world’s oldest surfboard manufacturing shops  
Robert Howson, General Manager and COO

Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim Game  
Neil Viserto, Senior Director, Corporate Sponsorships

“Mata Ne” Farewell Reception  
Rikiko Kubo Family  
Yuko Kaifu, Member, US-Japan Council  
Tammie Kanda, FYCEP Volunteer & Sponsor  
La Terazza Club House  
Kings Hawaiian Bakery

Visit to Disneyland  
Kayleigh Erber, Disneyland Resort  
Sandie Hubert, Disneyland Resort  
Tammie Kanda, FYCEP Committee and Sponsor  
Pepi Kelman

Fukushima Youth Cultural Exchange Program – Planning Committee  
June Aochi Berk  
Harumi Hata  
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Shige Higashi  
Tammie Kanda  
Thomas O’Kelly  
Atsuko Lee  
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