

**2014 St. Louis/Ishinomaki TOMODACHI EXCHANGE**  
**Japan America Society of St. Louis**  
funded by TOMODACHI/NAJAS

**Final Report**

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Japan America Society of St. Louis (JAS-STL) was awarded a two-year grant (\$60,000) from the Tomodachi/NAJAS Grassroots Exchange Program to invest in the next generation of Japanese and American people and deepen the relationship between the two countries through grassroots level people-to-people exchanges. JAS-STL selected Ishinomaki, Japan as its target for developing a grass-roots initiative. Ishinomaki is one of the most affected areas of Tohoku from the mega disaster. It was a city with 160,000 people. The city lost nearly 4,000 (3,938) people or 2% of the population in the disaster, including 182 school children. Of the 128 cities in which the lives were lost in the Tohoku region, it was Ishinomaki that had the largest number of deaths.

Our program, St. Louis/Ishinomaki Tomodachi Exchange, brought five students (age 12-15) and two adults from Ishinomaki and three adults from Tokyo to St. Louis from August 28 to September 4, 2013. During their one-week visit to St. Louis, the Japanese guests stayed with American host families and participated in the Japanese Festival at the Missouri Botanical Garden, which is a three-day festival attended by 30,000 - 40,000 people every year. The Japanese visitors participated in various activities at the festival, including a panel discussion with the Japanese Language School students, bon odori, cooking shows, and the St. Louis-Ishinomaki Tomodachi Yukata show. The venue provided a wide range of opportunities for the Japanese guests to interact with the diverse group of people of St. Louis.

In 2014, we took seven young American students (age 13 to 16) along with two adult chaperons. Similar to last year, Dr. Chikako Usui (JAS-STL President) served as the director of the program and led the group to Japan. This year's program was grassroots, in its people-to-people exchange. Mr. Hiroshi Abe in Ishinomaki coordinated the local arrangements. He involved all the Japanese students who came to St. Louis last year, plus the students' parents. Altogether, six Japanese families served as the local hosts. They managed daily logistics and spent all day with us. In addition, Mr. Abe recruited local students and volunteer translators-participants to facilitate the daily exchange. This allowed everyone to have a "tomodachi of the day" to enjoy personal interactions and communications in their second language.

Our program in Ishinomaki was for four days (July 29-August 2). We toured the areas devastated by the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami. We met with diverse groups of

people who have been involved in the reconstruction efforts in the past three years. We visited local people programs and institutions to see how they coped the disaster. These visits included: Mayor's office located on the 5<sup>th</sup> floor of a shopping mall; the reconstructed San Juan Bautista Museum that features the historical treasure -- the first Western-style ship built by Load Date that sailed to Rome on a diplomatic mission in 1614; and an old Buddhist temple on a mountain top that sheltered 600 people after the disaster. In addition, the program involved a comprehensive tour of the fishing business district, a boat ride to the Ishinomaki bay to observe scallop and seaweed farming recovery, meeting with the owner of Dream House (now a café and workshop) that generates wage employment for women who live in temporary housing. We spent time with the people of the Sanriku Kozakana Net, a volunteer group that disseminates stories of March 11 in manga to help families with children cope with their own experiences. This neighborhood group also picks up trash to re-claim their own living environment through weekly and monthly cleanup programs. We visited the Ishinomaki Children's Center that deals with psychological healing of young victims. Our visit culminated with the 91<sup>st</sup> Ishinomaki River Opening Festival and a spectacular fireworks show. The students and chaperons from St. Louis participated in the bon-dance parade of the River Opening Festival, which celebrated its 91<sup>st</sup> year. They danced Tairyobushi, a traditional song in celebration of harvest fishing, along with our Ishinomaki Tomodachi group.

The program included meetings with local volunteer groups to gain better understanding of the recovery and reconstruction processes. By visiting Ishinomaki, and meeting with those who have been involved in the re-construction processes in the last three years, we gained better understanding of how different efforts come in stages. Through meetings with entrepreneurial individuals and volunteer groups we learned how they initiated projects to address some immediate problems and moved on the next challenge. The students from St. Louis saw the leadership in action in different stages of the recovery process.

Another unique feature of our program in Ishinomaki included lodging. Female participants stayed at temporary housing units where disaster victims and recovery volunteers have stayed in the past three years. The male students were given an accommodation at a company dormitory that was refurbished and just opened. It was not feasible to arrange a home-stay for our students in Ishinomaki. While many families have recovered from the immediate struggles from the disaster, issues of unemployment and health problems are common challenges. However, we were very fortunate to end our visit to Japan with a two-day home-stay in Sendai, thanks to the arrangements made by the Miyagi International Association. The homestay experience provided valuable opportunities for our students to experience family's daily life and activities.

The St. Louis/Ishinomaki Friendship Program 2014 achieved a number of significant results:

- The program provided a very comprehensive tour of the re-construction processes in Ishinomaki. Meetings with local leaders and volunteers provided rare learning opportunities about what it takes to recover from a mega disaster.

- The program provided high-quality educational exchanges between the Ishinomaki students and St. Louis students. Our students completed a lot of homework to prepare themselves for the trip. They watched videos and read articles/newsletters that were sent directly from Ishinomaki. In these preparations, the students acquired prior knowledge and understanding of the site visits, people, and their activities.
- The students who did not have any prior ability to speak in Japanese took Japanese lessons. They delivered greetings and closing “thank you” remarks in Japanese at each site/group we visited.
- Through our pre-departure study sessions, the students grew in their energy for team building and learning, developed new goals, and developed leadership skills.
- The program enabled the Japan America Society of St. Louis to work with young students and their families. We were impressed by the high level of commitment and enthusiasm our student participants showed for the program.

## **Selection of 2014 Participants**

We selected eight local students who are in the 7<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> grade and at least 12 years of age. Over 100 students and their parents attended the two information meetings, which were held on December 16, 2013 and January 14, 2014. The application deadline was February 15, 2014. Application materials consisted of 3 forms: (a) application form, including a short essay (500 words); (b) two letters of recommendation, and (c) applicant information form. The essay asked the candidates why they wanted to visit Ishinomaki, how the program would contribute to their future, and what plans they had for sharing their experiences with others upon return.

We conducted the selection of 8 students in three stages: (1) Selection of 18 applicants from the initial pool of 30 applications; (2) face-to-face interviews; and (3) home visits. We recruited 18 judges from the JAS-STL Board and the general membership.

We received 30 completed applications. As soon as the deadline of February 15 passed, we began the first stage of screening to develop a short list of 18 candidates. The interviews took place at University of Missouri-St. Louis on Saturday, March 8 and Sunday 9, 2014. We interviewed 12 candidates on the first day and 6 on the second day. The judges rated each candidate using the evaluation sheet sheets we provided. Based on these results, the 18 candidates were ranked in numeric scores.

The 18 students who were invited for interviews were also invited for the opportunity to meet with the JAS-STL representatives in their homes. These home visits were voluntary - not required for the selection. All families replied and scheduled the home visits. These visits took place from March 1 to March 10, 2014. Nine people who served as judges in the first and second stages of selection conducted the home visits. We sent two people for each home visit. Each home visit lasted for 30-45 minutes.

### **Final selection (March 17-21) and announcement (March 24-28)**

Below is a list of eight selected participants:

	LAST	FIRST	School	SEX	AGE	GRADE	Japanese
1	Arbanas	George	Kirkwood HS	M	15	10th	1 YEAR
2	Kazdan	Joshua	John Burroughs	M	16	10th	N
3	McMurray	Angelena	La Salle Springs MS	F	13	8th	N
4	Mussman	Camille	Hixson MS WG	F	12	7th	N
5	Rutherford	Patricia Nami	Parkway Central MS	F	13	8th	9 years
6	Smith	Robert B.	John Burroughs	M	16	10th	N
7	Tahirovic	Dennis	Bayless HS	M	17	11TH	N
8	Wagner-Muns	Rachel	Ladue Horton Watkins HS	F	16	10th	4 YEARS

HS = Highschool

MS = Middle School

Note: Dennis Tahirovic withdrew from the program on June 15, 2014. He had other interests that grew in importance and caused scheduling conflicts.

### Selection of Chaperons

Chikako Usui, serving as the director of the program, recruited Hitomi Salini and Christopher Meyer. These two individuals managed daily schedule and logistical issues for the 2013 St. Louis-Ishinomaki Program and thus they knew well the Japanese students and adults who came to St. Louis in 2013. In addition to Ms. Salini and Mr. Meyer, two spouses (Mr. Tony Salini and Dr. Richard Colignon) joined the trip on their own expense to assist the chaperons and ensure a sufficient amount of supervision of the young students. Tony Salini took all the photos for the program.

### Pre-departure Study Meetings (April to July 2014)

Chikako Usui organized five study meetings to get the students and chaperons ready for the trip. In these meetings students received health and safety information in traveling as well as mini-lectures on various topics of Japanese culture and about Ishinomaki. To prepare for each specific site visit, the students read current information about the on-going recovery efforts or challenges. For example, the students were given a homework assignment to watch a documentary video, *Living Through March 11 2011* (97 minutes). They then discussed the plight of school children at Okawa Elementary School and the stories of Kadonowaki Elementary School from the video. The June 11 meeting dealt with an article about Sanriku Kozakana Net and Nohoko Nakayama, who wrote manga stories to help children understand their experiences with the mega disaster. In the July 7 study meeting we discussed the Ishinomaki families who live in temporary housing units based on an article published in *The Guardian*. After each study meeting, the students developed a list of questions they wished to address at each site visit. We sent the following list of questions to Mr. Abe who coordinated our visit in advance to facilitate our learning experiences.

#### Questions about the Disaster:

1. Where were you and what were you doing when the earthquake hit?

地震が来たとき、どこで何をしていましたか。

2. What were the teachers' thoughts as they were leading their students to safety?  
先生達が生徒を安全な場所に誘導しているとき、どんなことを考えていましたか。
3. How did children deal with the disaster? How did they manage the fear and pressures associated with evacuation?  
生徒達はどのように災害に対処しましたか。  
生徒達は恐怖や避難に伴うストレスをどう切り抜けたのでしょうか。
4. What do they do now for fun?  
現在生徒達の楽しみは何ですか。
5. Looking back at the events, what do you think about everything that has happened? What would you do differently if it were to happen again?  
災害経験を今現在どのように思いますか。また災害が起きたら、何か別の行動をとると思いますか。
6. What is the standard procedure for tsunamis now? How has protocol changed since the earthquake and tsunami?  
現在の避難訓練はどのように行なわれていますか。津波地震が起きてから内容が変わりましたか。

### Questions for our visit to Sanriku Kozakana Net (三陸こざかなネット)

1. What impressions would you like your Manga to leave, both with your children and outsiders?  
製作された漫画が お子さんや外部の人にどんな影響を与えたいことを望んでいらっしゃいますか。
2. Did you collaborate with those who write disaster protocol when you created your manga?  
漫画を製作されたとき、災害が起きたときの対処法を書いた人と意見を交換されましたか。
3. What challenges existed in translating the manga into English?  
漫画を翻訳されるにあたって、どんな難しさがあったのでしょうか。
4. (You are writing manga to help your and other families recover from the tsunami and earthquake.) What do you want to see happen in the Sanriku Kozakana Net in the future?  
将来三陸小魚ネットにどのようなことを期待されますか。
6. Do you and children still have a lingering fear of future disasters? Have your children changed since the tsunami? How are they dealing with the loss they suffered?  
ご自身やお子さん達は今も尚、将来の災害に対する恐怖を抱き続けていますか。

お子さんは津波被害以来、何か変わったことがありますか。また、災害で失ったものに対して、どう向き合い、対処されているでしょうか。

### Questions about temporary housing conditions 仮設住宅の状況と居住者についての質問事項

1. As residents, do you think that recovery is occurring at an acceptable pace?  
居住者の方々から見て、復旧作業はある程度満足のいく速度で行なわれていると思いますか。
2. Since everything has been destroyed or demolished, including a lot of beautiful places, how will the people of Ishinomaki build new stores, schools, and buildings? Will they be better than what existed before? Will the town be rebuilt? Will the people of Ishinomaki rebuild new stores, schools, and buildings?  
色々な美しい場所も含めあらゆるものが損害を受け、全壊したことから、石巻の人々はどのように店舗、学校、建物など再建されるのでしょうか。以前のものよりもっとよいものを作る計画でしょうか。
3. How are the people in the temporary housing today compared to when it was first built?  
仮設住宅に住んでおられる皆さんの現在の生活は当初の生活と比べていかがでしょうか。
4. Does the living in close quarters with people in the temporary housing bring you closer to your family?  
これまでの仮設住宅生活によって人や家族との絆が深まったでしょうか。
5. Temporary housing has packed together people of differing socioeconomic backgrounds and experiences. Has the experience of living with people of these different backgrounds helped to eliminate barriers between groups?  
仮設住宅には社会経済的に異なる背景や経験を持つ方々が居住されていると察します。この居住体験を通じて社会地位の違いや出身地の違いなどによる人間関係の溝が減ったでしょうか。

The pre-departure study meetings also included Japanese practices for basic greetings and thank-you remarks for each site visit. Hitomi Salini who teaches Japanese gave these lessons. Three out of eight students had some knowledge of Japanese and they took initiatives in delivering their remarks in Japanese. This triggered a big motivation for the remaining four students to deliver their own remarks using simple Japanese phrases. They took lessons in Japanese conversations.

In addition, the students had bon-odori practices (traditional summer festival dance) after three study meetings. They attended a Japanese tea ceremony once. One of the families organized a BBQ party for the entire group of participants and their families on June 13, 2014. While all these activities took place, one male student withdrew from the program in mid-June. He was sorry but wished to spend more of his time on other activities.

In short, we dealt with a group of highly motivated students. The team building energized the students and each of them began to use their skills for achieving group goals. They spent a large amount of time in preparing themselves for the journey.

## **The Program**

The 2014 St. Louis/Ishinomaki Tomodachi Exchange included 7 students (age 13-16), 2 chaperons, 1 director, and two accompanying spouses. Chikako Usui, Director of the Program and JAS-STL President, worked with Hiroshi Abe of Ishinomaki to plan the program in January 2014. She traveled to Ishinomaki in March 2014, met with Mr. Abe, the five Ishinomaki students who came to St. Louis last year and their parents, and visited the sites/groups that were planned for the 2014 Tomodachi exchange. In July, Mr. Abe fine-tuned the program itinerary.

The four-day program in Ishinomaki was rich in content and high in quality. It was a grassroots exchange in its purest form. The core group that hosted our visit was six families whose family members came to St. Louis last year. Hiroshi Abe took the leadership in organizing and managing daily logistics. He is an active member of the Lions Club in Japan. Since the Tohoku Earthquake and Tsunami of March 11, 2011, he has managed the Lions Club Volunteer Center in Ishinomaki and coordinated the work for recovery volunteers who came to Ishinomaki. The physical office of the Lions Club Volunteer Center includes two trailer homes. These trailer homes have been used to accommodate the volunteer workers. The facility accommodated our female students and their chaperon.

The male students and their chaperon were housed in a company dormitory that had just opened. The building used to be a company where Mr. Abe worked. The building was heavily damaged in the disaster and the company decided not to re-open in Ishinomaki. The building was sold and the new owner converted the building to a dormitory to accommodate the workers who come to Ishinomaki on many construction projects. Since the building was just refurbished and opened, it gave our male participants a comfortable and convenient accommodation.

In addition to the six core families, Mr. Hiroshi Abe recruited 13 student volunteers from local high schools, two college students, and two adults who spoke excellent English. The six families managed daily transportation needs by driving their cars and vans. This large number of local participants made it possible to have a “tomodachi of the day” and to enjoy personal communications in their second language.

Below is a summary list of the program participants in Ishinomaki.

### Ishinomaki Hosts:

Hiroshi Abe (M) (Director/Coordinator)

Akemi Abe\* (F)

Tomotaka Abe (M)

Maiko Abe (F)

Teru Abe\* (M) (age 15)

Kazuhiko Kataoka (M)	Hiromi Ktaoka (F)	Ami Kataoka* (F) (age 13)
Kazue Mogi (F)		Ami Mogi* (F) (age 14)
Keiko Kimura (F)		Yurika Kimura* (age 16)
Naoko Fujisoe* (F)		Keisuke Takahashi* (age 15)

\*-- refers to those who visited St. Louis in 2013.

#### Guests from Tokyo:

Hiromi Ishida\* (from Tokyo) (2013 Program Japan-side coordinator)  
 Max Nohara\* (from Tokyo)  
 Chosei Takahashi\* (from Tokyo Rescue Lions Club)  
 Takako Takahashi (from Tokyo)

#### Volunteers:

Tomoko Aonuma (English teacher from Yokohama)  
 Nahoko Nakayama (Founder of the Sanriku Kozakana Net)  
 Professor Suzanne Yonesaka (Hokkaido Gakuen, Sapporo) (Ms. Yonesaka and her two students have been working with Ms. Nakayama since the 3.11 disaster. They have published several manga booklets in English.)  
 Koki Uoya (College student from Hokkaido Gakuen, Sapporo)  
 Mayaka Itai (College student from Hokkaido Gakuen, Sapporo)  
 13 high school students from Ishinomaki

#### **Donations and Gifts for the Program**

Ms. Hiromi Ishida served as the Japan-side coordinator in the 2013 St. Louis/Ishinomaki Tomodachi Exchange. This past year she raised ¥500,000 from ten individuals and companies from the Tokyo area in support of the 2014 Tomodachi Exchange program. The list of names of these individuals and companies is included in the financial report.

Rawlings Sporting Goods Company, Inc. provided a gift of caps, t-shirts, and backpacks for all the participant from St. Louis.

#### **Homestay Arrangements in Sendai**

The following individuals and organizations coordinated our home-stay arrangements..

Ms. Masae Omura, Director, Planning & Coordination, Miyagi International Association  
 Ms. Seong Juyoung, Staff, Planning & Coordination, Miyagi International Association  
 Sister Tamaki Aoki, Principal, Sendai Shrayuri Gakuen High School  
 Yoshiko Ohwada, International Education Department, Sendai Shrayuri Gakuen HS



**Synopsis**  
**St. Louis/Ishinomaki Friendship 2014**  
**(Funded by TOMODACHI/NAJAS)**

**July 27: Departure from St. Louis and July 28: Arrival in Narita-Tokyo**

The St. Louis participants traveled nearly 6,000 miles to the Narita-Tokyo Airport in Japan. The participants stayed overnight at the Yoyogi Olympic Youth Training Center in Tokyo and left for Ishinomaki the next morning. After this long travel, two students wrote:

I have only left the country twice. The flight was terrific (other than the sleeping). Nami, Camille, and I were cracking up half the time. Once we left Narita Airport, our bags were sent to Ishinomaki and we took a train, took pictures, and practiced our Japanese. We went to a ramen noodle restaurant for dinner after we set our room up. The food was delicious!  
 (Angelena McMurray, age 13)

When we first boarded the plane. I was nervous, but also really excited that I had this opportunity to go to Japan. It was nice that we had the meetings with all the students and chaperones so that we could get to know each other and be comfortable. When we got to Japan, I couldn't believe it. It's finally here. We took a train, and the train was much nicer than what we have back in St. Louis. It's much cleaner, quieter, and they have television advertisements. There were so many people (in Tokyo). We got into taxis, which was the first one that I had ever been in. The ramen was really good. I am excited that I'm in Japan - all because of this program. (Patricia Nami Rutherford, age 13)

**July 29: Travel to Ishinomaki**

We rode a cab, commuter train in rush hours, Shinkasen, and a highway bus in this succession to get to Ishinomaki. It took five hours from Tokyo. Once we arrived in Ishinomaki, we received a warm welcome from our friends at the bus station. Mr. Abe gave us an orientation of the program at the Lions Volunteer Center office and gave us a tour of the facility where we were going to stay. In the evening we enjoyed a welcoming BBQ party. Traveling from Tokyo to Ishinomaki, one participant wrote:

For breakfast, we all chose the fish with miso soup and rice. Along with that, I had natto for the first time, which was quite an interesting taste. After breakfast, we boarded the Shinkansen to Sendai, and after a very speedy ride, we got on a bus for another ride to Ishinomaki (I took a nice nap). Upon reaching Ishinomaki, we were greeted by some of the people we would later get to know much better, Ami and Teru. We drove to the Lions Club Volunteer Center, unpacked, and then met some more friends: Ayaka, Mio and Jun, to name a few. Finally, for welcoming dinner, we had a Japanese-style barbeque which was absolutely delicious!  
 (George Arbanas, age 15)

**July 30:**

Our day started early for a boat ride along the coast of Ishinomaki to see a recovering scallop and seaweed farm. The local fishermen explained that after their scallop farming was destroyed by the tsunami, they bought juvenile scallops (instead of baby scallops) from Hokkaido. They have cultivated them for two years and they have grown to a marketable size. After the tour, they opened the fresh scallops and grilled them for us. One student wrote:

From the Ishinomaki harbor we took a ride in a commercial fishing boat into the Pacific Ocean. There, we saw the system of nets and buoys local fishermen use to cultivate scallops and wakame (seaweed), and pulled up a net of scallops. Back on dry land, we got to see the fishermen open up and take the meat from scallops and sea urchins, and taste the scallops both raw and grilled, with butter and with soy sauce. Josh and I got to try our hand at prying open a scallop and extracting the meat, and realized just how much skill and practice it takes, despite the fishermen's apparent ease. From there, we walked to the wakame processing plant, and observed a worker there weigh, package, and vacuum pack signature Ishinomaki seaweed to ship all across Japan. We presented our gifts, bowed, and thanked them. (Robert B. Smith, age 16)

Our excursion then took us to two schools: Okawa Elementary School, the site of the single, biggest loss of children's life - 73 out of 108 children perished with the tsunami. We then met with Ms. Nakayama, the founder/leader of Sanriku Kozakana Net. She answered our questions (sent to her ahead of time) in details and gave us a very educational talk about how the families and children there are re-building their community, which involved simple tasks such as picking up trash and sorting them for collection. Three students wrote about their experiences as follows:

Then, we were off to the Okawa elementary school, where 73 children died fleeing the tsunami. The site has been turned into a sort of memorial, the demolished building preserved, and with a shrine built nearby for the children and teachers who lost their lives. It was a truly humbling experience, seeing firsthand the gutted concrete structure of the school, with its shattered chalkboards and collapsed hallways, alongside the small incense holders and potted flowers. (Robert B. Smith, age 16)

Okawa elementary school was very sad and hard to see. The destruction was very drastic. Next to the school building was a very big cemetery crammed with black and grey tombstones of all different heights and widths, spread over the steep hill. I had never seen anything like it before. Just thinking about it all, it doesn't feel real. None of it should have happened. I cannot explain how bad I feel for all of these families. (Camille Mussman, age 13)

Our visit to the Sanriku Kozaka Net took us to a big residential area that was completely devastated. There were approximately seven-hundred homes prior to the tsunami. Now, it's filled with empty lots; flat land for as far as the eye can

see, covered with grass as tall as us. This was another of those places that made you stop and think. Seven-hundred homes is a lot to imagine, and a wall of water wiping that all away even more so. But sure enough, three years ago, there were houses, and people going about their daily lives. (George Arbanas, age 15)

One of the things we did while visiting areas around Ishinomaki that really stuck out to me was visiting the Sanriku Kozakana Net, and helping clean up the now-empty lots and fields that had once held houses before the tsunami struck. Seeing people from all sorts of backgrounds and ages coming together and helping to try and make the area livable again, and hearing just how often they did it (even the little kids, who thought of it almost like playing) really showed me how the Japanese people as a whole are working to overcome the challenges faced after the earthquake and tsunami...The way that the groups grew from one family to eventually the whole area showed me how a lot of the people in Japan are coming together to try and rebuild, even though small efforts. (Rachel Wagner-Muns, age 16)

We visited the house of Naoko Nakayama, founder of the Sanriku Kozakana Net and writer of manga on the disaster and recovery. With her and other volunteers, we scoured the former neighborhoods, now grassy fields, for garbage, finding so much that we were forced turn back early because our bags became too heavy to carry. Ms. Nakayama answered the questions we had written for her so long ago in St. Louis...The question was: "What would you do differently during the disaster?" She answered this question with her hopes; she explained that she teaches her children to greet their neighbors every morning with a smile, to get to know them and form friendships, because when another disaster hits, it will be these personal connections and cooperation that will help her children more than anything else. This answer struck me. Mrs. Nakayama turned the question around to face forward. I found this sentiment laced throughout all aspects of my stay in Ishinomaki. (Robert B. Smith, age 16)

### **July 31:**

This was our third day in Ishinomaki and it was also action-packed, starting with a visit to the Gambaro Ishinomaki Shrine, Kadonowaki Elementary School, and Hiyoriyama Park. In Kadonowaki Elementary School, over 300 children and teachers escaped to safety by moving to higher ground (Hiyoriyama Park). It was a strenuous escape route: we discussed about the rout after we watched the video *Living Through March 11* and on this day, we actually climbed the steep route. Next, we visited a large Buddhist temple Dogen-in, which stood at the mountain top. The temple sheltered over 400 people who lost their homes until they moved to temporary housing. Two students wrote:

We climbed the 200+ steep steps leading up the mountains as a safe route behind the school. They were uneven, steep steps, and I can imagine how hard this must have been for the younger kids escaping to safety. At the top was a beautiful, red Buddhist temple, which we first prayed in front of, prayed inside, and then listened to the lady there speak about the 400 homeless people that

stayed there over the course of weeks, and even months- while they looked for homes and jobs. (Camiile Mussman, age 13)

The plywood sign carried a message powerful in its simplicity: "Persevere, Ishinomaki." The sign has served as an international symbol of hope for the area's recovery. Although evidence of the loss suffered by the Ishinomaki community is still distinctly apparent in the kilometer of empty weed fields along the shoreline, so are signs of rejuvenation. Sunflowers planted around the sign face skyward, manifesting a strong commitment to look forward and overcome unprecedented tragedy. When we arrived to a larger Buddhist temple, Dogen-in, we removed our shoes and bowed before the entrance. One at a time, we presented incense offerings at the altar before kneeling on the tatami mats while the temple steward rang a gong. A sense of awe seemed to envelop the group as we recognized the age of this mystical venue, and its role in housing hundreds of families in the days after the tsunami. (Joshua Kazdan, age 16)

After a quick tour of the re-opened San Juan Bautista Museum, we visited the Ishinomaki Children's Center. This small NPO has professional counselors and social workers, college student volunteers and local adult volunteers. They work with the children to overcome the psychological trauma they suffered from the disaster. In the afternoon we were invited to a meeting with Mayor of Ishinomaki. Reflecting on these visits, the students wrote:

When we visited the Children's Center, there were about ten children who survived the disaster. On the walls were their drawings, starting from right after the tsunami to several months later, November of the same year. Right after the tsunami, the pictures were very abstract and shaky, with very few recognizable shapes. However, as time went on, lines grew steadier, kanji (most often, life) appeared, and ideas and hopes for a better future appeared on the papers around the room. The largest creation in the room was a miniature model of the area of the city that had been destroyed, then created what they thought should be rebuilt there. Even the youngest child, who I believe was four or five years old, created a statue that would glow with rainbow light (on the miniature model) to encourage people to move on. The dreams for the future by these children showed the hopeful city they wanted to see once again. (Rachel Wagner-Muns, age 16)

We visited a children's center where young residents of Ishinomaki participate in activities that facilitate recovery from the psychological trauma inflicted by the disaster. They built a model of Ishinomaki's ideal future, providing a vision of hope. Next, we were afforded the opportunity to meet the mayor of Ishinomaki. He discussed how the size and complexity of Ishinomaki has often been a divisive force in the past, but in this time of hardship, he emphasized the essentiality of unity and cohesion. (Joshua Kazdan, age 16)

### **August 1: Ishinomaki River Opening Festival**

Our fourth day in Ishinomaki began at 5 o'clock in the morning for the tour of Ishinomaki fish market that handles the auction and distribution of fresh fish. We received a comprehensive tour of the market by Mr. Suno, President of Ishinomaki Fishing Association. The sight of the wide variety of fresh fish and busy traffic of scooters, trucks, sellers, and buyers was very exciting. The president also showed us how they inspect the fish for radiation. He showed us the monitoring process and three different kinds of semiconductor detector machines for testing Cesium. 34. He explained that these state-of-the-art machines were developed with Tohoku University to restore public confidence in eating fish and fish products from Ishinomaki.

The meeting with a female owner of the Dream House was also very interesting. She is an entrepreneur in the recovery efforts. Her house was the only house that survived the tsunami in her neighborhood and she used the house for meeting the needs of her neighborhood. She described different projects she started along the process. Currently, the house is a café serving lunch with the fresh vegetables grown in the garden. It also produces various crafts that are sold elsewhere locally and nationally. The house employs women who live in temporary housing.

In the late afternoon the students had much fun at the Ishinomaki River Opening Festival, which celebrated its 91<sup>st</sup> year. This is a celebration by the entire city. Our group participated in the bon-dance procession that took place in the main street of Ishinomaki. The procession involved nearly 1,000 dance participants, dressed in yukata (summer kimono), in a seamless flow of dancers from one group to the next, all moving at a snail's pace. They danced Taiyo-bushi, which is a traditional song for the celebration of harvest fishing. Streets were filled with onlookers who arrived early to grab prime spots for viewing the colorful, traditional dance parade. Our students were tired after one-hour of dancing but they all had a very unique, enjoyable experience. Two students wrote as follows:

On our last evening in Ishinomaki, we danced the Taiyo-Bushi down the main street. The smoke and the smell of sweat amalgamated with the overpowering aromas of Asian cooking permeated the air. The humidity was uncomfortable, but there was also something surreal and beautiful about the experience. The sun was setting above the buildings and the locals in yukata and happi coats smiled at us as we attempted the traditional dance. (Joshua Kazdan, age 16)

In the evening, we arrived at the much-anticipated Kawabiraki Matsuri, the River Opening Festival. Despite the long, hot path of the dance parade, everyone danced the Bon Odori well and made it to the end intact. When I was learning the dance, I thought it was quite easy, and it is - until you have to repeat it over and over at a snail's pace down a crowded road in tight fitting clothes. I have a newfound respect for Japanese classical dancers, especially festival performers now. After changing out of the dance yukata and back into street clothes, everyone got an hour of free time, much to our delight. Ami and her mother were kind enough to help me find a jembei, a traditional Japanese men's wear that has

become popular with some teen girls. I had a lot of fun talking to people in Japanese, and though it was very difficult to describe words I didn't know at times (try describing an otter in a foreign language), everyone seemed to get what I was saying and would happily reply. To end a spectacular day, a spectacular fireworks show was appropriate. As I finish typing this and prepare to pack for Sendai, I can just think of two things: I wish I could stay, and someday I'm sure I will return. (Rachel Wagner-Muns, age 16)

### **August 2:**

Our last day in Ishinomaki featured presentations by the St. Louis students and a farewell lunch. For presentations, we used the same drills we did in the pre-departure study meeting: We divided the students in two groups and asked them to prepare a presentation in Japanese about their experiences in Ishinomaki. Each group had at least one St. Louis student with some basic Japanese, and we also added to each group the students from Ishinomaki and Japanese adult volunteers who served as translators during our visit. The goal of this exercise was to use leadership skills, ability to reflect on their experiences, and communicate in English and Japanese. The drill also gave a rare opportunity for the Japanese participants to observe American-style group discussions. They were also given an opportunity to assist the young American students in translating their script into basic Japanese. Both groups of St. Louis students made very thoughtful, impressive presentations in Japanese in front of some 25 people. We concluded our morning session with a presentation of gifts to each Japanese participant. We brought a gift package from St. Louis for the occasion. We had a delicious lunch prepared by the six Ishinomaki families and then headed to Sendai by train.

### **August 2-4 Homestay in Sendai**

Once in Sendai, our students met with their host families and left with them for their two-day home stay experience. Chikako Usui met with the people who were involved in making this arrangement: Ms. Seong Juyoung (planning coordinator staff) and Ms. Masae Omura (Director) from the Miyagi International Association (MIA); and Sister Tamaki Aoki (Principal) and Ms. Yoshiko Ohwada (teacher in the International Education Department) from Sendai Shirayuri Gakuen. MIA reached out Sendai Shirayuri Gakuen to recruit host families with high school age children to match our St. Louis students. Sendai Shirayuri Gakuen is a prestigious Catholic school for females in Sendai (founded in 1893). Professor Emeritus Watanabe who is on the Board of Shirayuri Gakuen also joined the meeting.

All host families have two children. Four of the seven families are nuclear families (the parents and two children) and three are extended families, involving the three generations. Four out of seven host-families have a stay-at-home mothers and three have working mothers. The female high school students from Shirayuri Gakuen are pursuing their high school diploma in international education, have interests in studying abroad, and speak some English. Many of them have traveled abroad, including Australia, U.S., and China.

### **August 3**

Chikako Usui made a phone call in the morning to each host family to see if there were requests or concerns. Except for those families that were gone for sightseeing, she also

talked to the St. Louis students. All the responses were positive. Our students expressed their home stay experience as follows:

I really got to experience what it is like to live in Japan. My family's last name was Abiko, and the two daughters were Miyu (age 14), and Shona (age 16). All four of them (the two daughters and their parents) were EXTREMELY nice and welcoming. They taught me how to make takoyaki and chop up raw octopus, which was an experience. I was able to learn and communicate through a mix of very basic Japanese and English with them because Shona knew some English. They took me to malls, Wal-Mart, a beach by an area that had a minor tsunami 50 years ago, ice cream shops, and the 'Anpanman' museum. I have never participated in a homestay before. You really bond with your family- you are with them all the time, and you try to communicate with them, you laugh with them...It was an amazing experience. Saying goodbye was very hard for me. (Camille Mussman, age 13)

I very much enjoyed my time with the host family. While my Japanese was far below the level of the 12 year old girl in the family, everyone was very impressed at how hard I tried to understand what was said to me. With my homestay family, I ate homemade Japanese food, including the delicious okonomiyaki. The Abe family brought me to both traditional Japanese places, like Sendai castle, and more modern places, like the local UNIQLO. I became closest with the family's mother and younger sister, though the father and older sister were very kind and encouraging. During the homestay, I also saw how busy Japanese people tend to keep themselves even in the summer. The father had to work, but the mother kept running errands, and the two girls always made sure to have something planned for the day as opposed to just taking a day for lazing about the house. (Rachelle Wagner-Muns, age 16)

(Note: Rachel has studied Japanese for four years, including two intensive summer language immersion programs at Concordia Language Village in Minnesota.)

My home-stay experience was truly fantastic. The Takahashi consisted of a couple in their early forties, Mrs. Takahashi's parents, and their daughter, 15 year old Honoka. They took me to Aizu in Fukushima, home of the famous Tsuruga-jo castle, where the last of the samurai made their final stand against Meiji forces. We spent most of the morning touring the rebuilt castle and museum. After a hearty lunch of *soba* and *udon*, we sat down in a small shop to paint our own *akabeko*, red cow figurines that bring good luck. We finished the long day with delicious conveyor sushi and ice cream. On our last day, we stayed home in the morning and cleaned up a little around the house. Honoka and Mrs. Takahashi attempted to teach me calligraphy, with limited success, and then hiragana and katakana. For lunch, Mrs. Takahashi's sister and her two young boys came over. We ate, and set out for the iconic islands of Matsuma. We walked out across a long bridge, and hiked around the largest island, admiring the landscape in the descending mist. Finally, we finished off the experience

with one more big family feast. Eyes became teary on both sides as we waved goodbye in the lobby of the hotel, and I will always remember the kindness these total strangers, now great friends, showed me. It was the perfect way to finish off a marvelous trip, and I hope to stay in touch with the Takahashi's long into the future. (Robert B. Smith, age 16)

The first and most striking aspect of my host family was their work ethic. The Gottos all seemed to take pride in their work. Although they are able to spend little time with one another, they somehow maintain a strong relationship. This impressed me greatly, and I hope to emulate both their industrious work ethic and their treatment of one another in my own family. The diet and the restraint of the Japanese also surprised me. The food that I ate was low in fat and carbohydrates, and while I was in Japan I felt better than I normally do in America. When I gave my host family a box of Oreo cookies, they each took one cookie per night, and then closed the box until the following evening. In America, I take a stack of perhaps five cookies, and shamelessly shove them into my mouth. I hope to emulate this Japanese health practice in my own life, though I don't know if I personally have the self-control to do so. (Joshua Kazdan, age 16)

### **August 5: Departure from Narita-Tokyo; Arrival in St. Louis**

## **Conclusion**

The 2014 St. Louis/Ishinomaki Tomodachi Exchange provided rich experiences for both the St. Louis and Ishinomaki participants. The program led to deeper understandings of human and organizational complexities involved in disaster recovery processes.

The students from St. Louis worked hard for new adventures. They were engaging in their social interactions and thoughtful in their reflections. The Ishinomaki students who came to St. Louis last year had the visible signs of personal growth over the year. They conducted themselves with more confidence and became more engaging and articulate in conversations. They were more willing to communicate in English and express their feelings than they did last year.

This TOMODACHI EXCHANGE program strengthened the St. Louis-Ishinomaki friendship that was initiated last year, and this year the program expanded the friendship networks of the people in the two countries. The program provided valuable experiences for all the participants from St. Louis. In all the places we visited we saw that a strongly bonded neighborhood/community is the key to disaster recovery. We learned that strong human connections and relationships are the source of strength.



**2014 St. Louis/Ishinomaki TOMODACHI EXCHANGE**  
**Japan America Society of St. Louis**

DATE	DAY	ACTIVITY
July 27 (Sun)	1	AA #305 8:50 AM St. Louis – Dallas/Ft Worth AA # 61 2:20 PM Dallas/Ft Worth - Narita (Chip Myer & Tony Salini will lead the group)
July 28 (Mon)	2	4:15 PM Arrive in Narita Lodging at National Olympic Memorial Youth Center
July 29 (TUE)	3	Travel from Tokyo to Sendai, Sendai to Ishinomaki Orientation and visit to the affected areas
July 30 (W)	4	Boat tour of scallops and Wakame seaweed farming recovery Visit to Okawa Elementary School Memorial Buffet Lunch Visit to Sanriku Kozakana Net; trash collection work Preparation for the festival dance at the home studio of Kyoroku sensei
July 31 (TR)	5	Visit to Gambaro Ishinomaki Shrine; Kadonowaki Elementary School, Hiyoriyama Park/Shrine Dogen-in Temple; San Juan Bautista Museum; Ishinomaki Children's Center Visit to Mayor's office Lunch Visit to the largest Temporary housing complex and a senior support center (Note: This visit had to be canceled due to traffic congestions caused by road blockage for the festival) Manga Museum; Visit to a shopping mall and dinner
August 1 (F)	6	Tour of the Ishinomaki Fish Market Visit to Dream House in Onagawa; Lunch at the Dream House Ishinomaki Summer Festival; Opening parade; Fireworks
August 2 (SAT)	7	Student Presentations/Farewell party Travel from Ishinomaki to Sendai (12:51 PM JR train) Meeting with the host families in Sendai (3 PM) - Homestay begins
August 3 (SUN)	8	Homestay
August 4 (Mon)	9	8 PM Return from homestay; 10:50 PM Depart for Narita
August 5 (Tue)	10	7 AM Arrive in Narita Airport Breakfast AA #176 11:30 AM Narita – 9:25 AM Dallas/Ft Worth; AA # 166 12:30 PM Dallas/Ft Worth - 2:05 PM St. Louis

**Pre-departure Orientation Meeting Dates**

April 27 (Sunday)	2-4 pm
May 11 (Sunday)	2-4 pm
June 13 (Friday)	6 pm BBQ Party
June 15 (Sunday)	2-4 pm
July 6 (Sunday)	2-4 pm
July 24 (Thursday)	4-6 pm