



2015 TOMODACHI Ties Through Taiko
Final Report

Program Overview

The Japan-America Society of Pennsylvania (JASP) was pleased to welcome high school students from the Nihon Fukushi Daigaku Fuzoku Koto Gakkou's taiko club, "Rakko," in Mihama, Aichi Prefecture in August 2015 as part of the TOMODACHI/NAJAS Grassroots Exchange Initiative.

In addition to the program grant received through the TOMODACHI Initiative, the JASP collaborated with Pittsburgh Taiko community drumming group, Pittsburgh CAPA Creative and Performing Arts magnet school on the logistics of the program and received financial or in-kind support from the Pittsburgh Pirates, Delta, and UPMC.

Seven students from the Pittsburgh Public School district applied to participate in the exchange and began practicing taiko drumming beginning in June. The theme of this program was "Leadership in the Arts," which helped students to gain tools to engage in cross-cultural communication about art and the leadership skills necessary to create a thriving cultural environment. At the same time, this program enabled musical exchange, as students taught songs and performance techniques and gave a joint performance at the end of the week-long stay.

The Rakko students arrived on Friday night and were greeted at the airport by their host families. On Saturday, we gathered for a lunch welcome picnic. Rakko won third place in the national high school bunkasai competition and asked us to create as many performance opportunities as possible for them. Their performance at the picnic delighted the hosts, JASP members and board who attended. On Sunday they spent most of the day with their host families before attending an exciting Pittsburgh Pirates game. Monday through Friday they practiced with Pittsburgh students and Pittsburgh Taiko members in the morning. The Rakko members built up their leadership skills by leading practice warmups, teaching the Pittsburgh students their joint piece, and demonstrating pieces from their repertoire at the end of each practice.

The afternoon activities ranged from cultural organizations, to sightseeing, to shopping. With the exception of the Japanese-language Mitsubishi Electric Power Products visit, thanks to the support of UPMC, the seven Pittsburgh students were able to participate equally in the week's events. Hosts also organized evening activities including a pinball party and a trip to the local theme park.

Host families, JASP members, and members of the Pittsburgh students' families came for the performance on Saturday. Like at the earlier performances, the audience was very enthusiastic and the students felt proud of their accomplishment. The final piece was a Japanese American bon odori that the audience joined in dancing on stage.

The Rakko students returned to Japan with a greater sense of understanding of the United States, and the Pittsburgh students saw them off with great enthusiasm for the 2016 exchange. Thank you for this opportunity!

Narrative Summary

Friday, August 7

The host families gathered in the baggage claim of the Pittsburgh International Airport and waited eagerly for the students to arrive. Finally, the Japanese students, dressed in their matching Rakko tracksuits, came down the escalator to meet their families. Each student received an orientation packet with survival English, the trip schedule, and information about Pittsburgh. All of the students were placed individually with host families, with the exception of Kazue Iwata, who was with the chaperone Akiko Okuda. Before we knew it, all of the baggage was collected and the students were off for their first night in the United States.

Saturday, August 8

The students enjoyed the morning with their host families before coming together for a picnic lunch in the park. JASP members, volunteers, and board gathered for a potluck cookout with grilled hamburgers, hot dogs, and chicken wings. Several of the Pittsburgh students were also able to participate in the picnic as a first meeting. The Rakko students performed for the guests after the meal to enthusiastic applause, and returned home to spend the evening with their hosts.

Sunday, August 9

The students spent the morning with their host families, enjoying American food and various activities including shopping and sightseeing, or just games with the family. The Pittsburgh Pirates generously donated tickets for the students to see a baseball game during their stay. The students enjoyed cheering for the Pirates and chatting with the people sitting nearby.

Monday, August 10

Both Pittsburgh and Japanese students gathered at CAPA 6-12 for a morning of musical exchange practice. The Rakko students took a leadership role in guiding warm ups and cool downs, as well as teaching the Pittsburgh students some techniques. The students had an outdoor lunch at Moe's Southwest Grill before walking up to the City-County Building to perform in the Portico for the Mayor and the City news channel. The Mayor shook each student's hand and posed for a group picture. The students went through the historic Allegheny County Jail and courthouse where *Silence of the Lambs* and other movies were filmed. Afterwards the students visited Judge McCarthy for an explanation of a civil trial. The Judge let the students take turns sitting in his seat and holding the gavel. The Just Ducky Tour boat picked us up at the City-County Building for a tour of the city. Education Outreach Coordinator Katsuko Shellhammer and local J-LEAP participant Shunji Iwasaki took turns translating the explanation of the tour guide. The Pittsburgh and Japanese students took turns driving the amphibious vehicle in the water. We took a break at Station Square plaza and then rode the Monongahela Incline to the scenic views on Mount Washington. The students got ice cream and enjoyed taking group photos and selfies. It was a busy first day of practice, and many students slept in the car once their host families came to get them.

Tuesday, August 11

After Tuesday's practice, students enjoyed a homemade Japanese lunch at CAPA. Two music therapists from UPMC gave a demonstration of how a drum circle can be used for therapy, including improvisation and call and response. The World Affairs Council of Pittsburgh gave a short presentation on their work in the classroom for global education. Students walked through downtown to visit the CLO Academy of Musical Theatre, the Pittsburgh Cultural Trust, and the Pittsburgh Opera, including the costume shop. To get to the Opera, students walked through the Strip District, with many grocery items and small shops from around the world. They enjoyed buying novelty and retro candy for souvenirs. One of the hosts organized a pizza and pinball party.

Wednesday, August 12

Wednesday after practice we boarded the buses for lunch and an explanation by Conflict Kitchen, a local art restaurant that focuses on countries with which the U.S. is in conflict. They strive to bring together the citizens in a peaceful way to create mutual understanding – the current country is Cuba. The Rakko students then performed for passersby in Schenley Plaza, in front of Conflict Kitchen and the University of Pittsburgh campus. Kathryn Heidemann from the Carnegie Mellon University Master of Arts Management program talked with students about the skills and careers you can have in the arts industry outside of just performing. Finally, the students enjoyed a visit to the Carnegie Museums of Art and Natural History.

Thursday, August 13

By Thursday, the practice was really coming together. Pittsburgh Taiko taught the students "Ee Ja Nai Ka," a Japanese American obon song by PJ Hirabayashi of San Jose Taiko. We headed to the NorthSide for lunch, a performance and craft project at Manchester Craftsmen's Guild. Students split into two groups and took turns screen printing an original T-shirt design and creating their own button pins in an example of the type of arts enrichment programming that Manchester Craftsmen's Guild Youth and Arts program.

Friday, August 14

After a final practice on Friday, the Japanese students bussed up to JASP member Mitsubishi Electric Power Products for a lunch with Japanese expat workers. They enjoyed sharing their stories about their work. MEPP employees gathered outside for a performance by Rakko, followed by a Japanese-language tour of the factory. Then it was back on the bus for a shopping trip to the Ross Park Mall, where several Pittsburgh students rejoined the group. The host families organized an impromptu trip to Kennywood, the local amusement park.

Saturday, August 15

The students took the morning to relax with their host families before the dress rehearsal. Since the date was the official end of WWII, Executive Director Amy Boots took a moment at the beginning of the concert to highlight how far we have come in the friendship between Japan and the United States. Around 70 people attended the concert, which concluded with the audience joining in the Ee Ja Nai Ka bon odori and joining the students in the Farewell Reception afterward. The Japanese students had a final dinner and evening with their host family. Host families and students gathered for a tearful goodbye in the wee hours of Sunday morning at the Pittsburgh Airport.

Participant Information & Testimonials



Rintaro Ishikawa

I learned a lot from participating in this program. I can't speak English well so I was really worried. But the Americans were so nice and talked to me anyway so I stopped being worried. My host family met me with a smile and me and I was so relieved. My host family doesn't usually eat breakfast and they only do laundry once or twice a week so I was surprised. I can't speak English but I tried as hard as I could and I was happy whenever I got through. I thought, I want to try harder to speak more proactively and I surprised myself. I'm grateful that my host family was so nice. If my host family ever comes to Japan, I want to meet them with a smile and show them all the wonderful things about Japan. We performed at Manchester Craftsmen's Guild and Mitsubishi and at first I was nervous but when we finished they gave us the kind of applause that you'd never get in Japan. I felt so good. I was so glad I came to America. In this project through taiko there's a connection, I really felt that tie. Because I was involved in taiko, I got to meet American high schoolers, I think we both grew. I'm so glad I could participate in this program.



Kazue Iwata

From August 7 to the 17th, what felt like a long time and a short time, we did so much. Since it was my first time going abroad, I was very excited about the TOMODACHI program. When we got to the airport, I felt again that America is so big, and I was surprised too by how big my homestay family's house was. I thought the food was big and sweet. I was glad to get the experience of trying American food and sweets.

Conversation was the most problematic for me. I didn't know a lot of vocabulary and there were many times I didn't know what people were saying to me. At first I didn't know how to reply, but I think I really grew in that area. I just tried my best to say what I could without worrying about grammar and using an app. Whenever I talked about my family, or my hobbies, or Japan, the person I was talking to was happy, and that made me really happy.

During taiko practice at CAPA, I met a lot of people and I thought it was a really good experience. I was so happy that I could communicate with Americans through taiko. Now I'm thinking that I want to stay in the United States a little longer, and that I could have this fun experience is thanks to you all. Thank you!



Sota Nakazawa

The first thing that I felt when I came to the US was that they were really good at communication. They were also really nice. When I was leaving the airport I was so nervous but the cabin attendant came over and was so nice and funny. When I lost my headphones they searched all over and even though we never found them that sense of trying so hard impressed me from the first day. After that I met my host family for the first time and my host mother used a translation app and easy English so we could talk. After that I was tired and went to bed. When I woke up in the morning and went downstairs there was a big breakfast lined up – waffles, fruit, crispy bacon. My family was Christian so they usually say a prayer before they eat. They took me to Pittsburgh's biggest church, where they talked about Jesus's childhood, and sang songs with a live band, and even though I'm not Christian and don't understand English I had fun. I got along well with Pittsburgh taiko members. We talked everywhere we went and took a lot of pictures.

Conversing smoothly was difficult, but by using words and the translation app, I could say my opinion and understand the other's thoughts. I probably will never be able to play taiko in Pittsburgh again, but my memories will be my treasure my whole life.



Sayaka Ooishi

I think I experienced and learned and grew a lot on this trip to America. I was really worried because I can't speak English. But my host family was Japanese Brazilian so I could communicate with them in Japanese. So I used English during the exchange with Pittsburgh Taiko. At first I thought it would be impossible to use English so I didn't talk to anyone. But the Pittsburgh students talked to me and gave me candy so I started to feel positively about communication. I was so happy that I started to talk little by little. When taiko practice started and we were showing them the song, they watched so seriously that I really got into it. When we taught them the song "Raku," of course we couldn't do it in Japanese. Teaching them how to twirl their sticks was much harder than when we teach first year students, but they were trying their best to understand my terrible English so I thought I have to try hard too.

More than anything the taiko performances are staying in my heart. Even though they weren't on a real stage, so many people came, and when we finished they clapped and cheered like you couldn't imagine in Japan. It felt good to make people so happy and I realized that the sound of taiko could cross the walls of language. Finally, in the concert so many people came and we could all participate in sharing our feeling and smiles together.



Mika Ooiwa

The area where I think I grew the most is, I got to like English. Before I came to the U.S. I hated English so much I even hated the class and the teacher. So I was really nervous about my host family, but they came to get me and were so warm and friendly. I don't understand English so I didn't say anything, but my host family started talking to me until I got used to it and started to be able to talk myself.

There were so many differences, like "ofuro" is bathtub and they don't do laundry everyday so I felt a little out of place but they are just things you have to get used to. I feel indebted to them for picking me up every day, and I didn't eat much so I sometimes left food behind. Next time I come to Pittsburgh I want to eat everything. For some reason I just didn't get hungry this time. The kids that I taught taiko to listened so well and tried their best even though it was difficult. The environment was nice, and it was cool so I think Pittsburgh is a nice place. Because of the language barrier I had a hard time talking with my host family's kids, but I was happy that I could communicate through taiko. I was really glad that I did taiko. This was the first time I thought that the simple stuff from English class came in handy. I'm glad that this trip to Pittsburgh changed my opinion. I'm going to remember this and do my best!



Rie Ookubo

I think there are so many ways I grew by going to America. First, I think I became less reserved. Before I would stop what I was doing if other people came around but now I will just say, I'm doing this, ok? The second thing is, I can talk to people more than before. I used to cut off conversations pretty quickly but now unexpectedly I have more chances to talk longer. The third thing is now I can understand spoken English, have a conversation, and translate better than before. At first I was always asking my host family and shop clerks to repeat themselves but I started to get better at understanding it the first time. I can also read product signs and things like that. The fourth thing is the realization of the 27th performance of our taiko club, which is why the performance was a success. At first when we were in the plane we were all worried whether it would be ok but we could teach the Pittsburgh kids with just gestures and words and I think we had a really great performance. So with this I truly thought people like us who are about to retire from taiko don't have anything to regret.



Gen Oowaki

The 8 days of this program made me realize that with music you don't need words. When I got to America of course all the signs were in English and I was going to my host family by myself so I was really nervous. I sort of can speak English, but the native speakers' speed, pronunciation, and intonation, there were so many things I didn't understand. Even when my host family used simple English there were times I didn't know if I understood them or they understood me. There were also times that the practice with the Pittsburgh students didn't go as smoothly as I wanted. But, when we started our performance and the audience was shouting "Bravo!" and "Amazing!" it was so much fun and I really understood why we came to America. I think we could transmit our feelings to the people who were watching. I think it's a great honor that we got to have this experience in high school. So many people helped us and I really think we could show Japan's culture and the great things about it. I'm grateful to all those people. I think it would be good to keep this experience alive. Thank you very much.



Moe Sakakibara

This is my first experience overseas. So I got to experience different atmosphere and values. Every day was a series of surprises. First of all my English isn't very good so I was worried if I'd do well when I came to America. I knew we'd be teaching some taiko so I was worried about communication. But even though Americans only speak English they smiled and used gestures when they were talking. At first I was nervous and couldn't say anything but little by little I started to be able to talk. This was a big difference from Japan and I thought I'd better learn from it. In Japan, if you're nervous you can't really take a proactive approach to communication. The Americans tried to talk and expand their circle of communication. There is a language barrier but I learned that you can talk with gestures and expressions. Also, I was surprised to learn that the Americans were studying so many other languages. I heard that one of them can speak Chinese. I could speak with expressions and gestures but I couldn't speak with words so I felt again keenly that my studies weren't enough. I believe that English is going to be important in my life so I decided to work on my English ability. I was really worried about communication but even if I worried that the word was wrong or the values were different, somehow it came across. But, I learned that it's even better when you can speak the language. I want the things I learned on this program to be useful to me in the future.



Runa Takashiba

There are so many ways I grew on this program. The first one is English. Before I left I wasn't good at English and I was worried. But my host family and the American kids spoke to me as much as they could and I was so happy when we understood each other. So, I tried more proactively to speak English. I was so surprised that I felt that way. At first I was surprised by the American high schoolers talking to me but eventually I stopped being nervous and started to talk thanks to their smiling faces. The second thing was how nice my host family was. For my first time overseas I wasn't used to anything but they were always smiling, taking me to famous places and taking good care of me. I'm so happy that I had such a nice host family. The third thing is the performances. We played at the lunch break of Manchester Craftsmen's Guild and Mitsubishi. At first I was nervous but when the audience was cheering and clapping I wanted to put my heart into the performance even more. I want to keep the growth that I had during this program. For me it was a great 10 days.



Misa Hamajima

The Nihon Fukushi Daigaku Rakko club members who participated in the TOMODACHI program learned a lot. I learned so many things on this program. First of all, I felt at the beginning that English is difficult. When we arrived at the airport or went to the gate, no one was there to help us in Japanese. When I could converse well in English, I was so happy. But, I still had trouble speaking to store clerks. It was such a help that I was able to talk in Japanese with one member of my homestay family. But to keep this friendship alive I want to study not just my English textbook but also English conversation.

The next thing I felt was that music really transcends language and connects people. In this program we performed several times. In the park, a company, and other places, a lot of people came to see us. Unlike a Japanese audience, they got so excited. I was so happy that the people were cheering for us. For me who is not good at English, I was able to communicate through taiko. Without forgetting to thank the teachers and trip organizers, I want to keep these wonderful memories.



Akari Sawada

We third year Nihon Fukushi Dagaku high school students of Rakko went to Pittsburgh for 7 days. When the trip was first decided I was worried about English and going to a place I didn't know. Even though I was worried I decided to come and on the long flight and layover we finally landed at 11 PM. Our host families met us and we each went to our houses. The next day we had a barbecue and a performance. After that we had performances all over the place. I'd only performed in Japan so I was worried about their reaction, but beyond my expectations they had a good reaction. They were clapping and cheering and afterwards there were many people who came to talk to us. I couldn't understand what they were saying but from the looks on their faces I knew we made a good impression with our taiko. In the afternoons we went to many visits with the American high schoolers and we communicated in broken English and broken Japanese what we were thinking and I think we passed the language barrier.

After these 7 days, what I thought was, even if you can't speak the language, the most important thing is to try to get to know it and try to get to know how the people who live there feel.



Rina Tanaka

We 12 Nihon Fukushi Daigaku student s and teachers participated in the TOMODACHI program in Pittsburgh. It was my first trip overseas and my first homestay so I was very nervous. My family was a Japanese woman Yukari, her husband Darrin, and their daughter Abby. The Fabrizi family was very warm and treated me like part of the family. I was relieved and my American life started, During our 11 days we learned and experienced a lot. First of all, there was the taiko exchange at CAPA. Japanese wouldn't get the message across so I used a little bit of English and gestures and songs. After practice we went a lot of different places. We saw Manchester Craftsmen's Guild and Mitsubishi and had performances there. I was so happy that the people who watched were cheering and clapping. I don't think many Americans have seen taiko so I was glad that we could show them a little Japanese culture. On the last day, we performed, Pittsburgh Taiko performed, and then we performed together. Even though we practiced our joint song for such a short time, performing it was so much fun and I was smiling. Even if you can't understand the language, I thought it was wonderful that we could communicate through taiko. For these 11 days we experienced a lot of things different from normal life and I think we all grew. Someday I want to perform taiko in Pittsburgh again. I'm so glad I got to participate in the TOMODACHI program.

"I'm in awe that I had an experience like this. I would never have had another opportunity to see something like this." - Manchester Craftsmen's Guild employee

Media Coverage

Pittsburgh Taiko's You Tube Channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLr9x0HrkgefZ8PBK5AR5P0pPXEmxidJ4j>

Drumming up friendship: Tomodachi program hosts musical exchange, concert

<http://www.post-gazette.com/local/south/2015/07/31/Drumming-up-friendship-Tomodachi-program-hosts-musical-exchange-concert/stories/201507310060>

Concert Announcements

<http://www.worldpittsburgh.org/event/tomodachi-ties-through-taiko-concert/>

<http://www.pghcitypaper.com/pittsburgh/tomodachi-ties-through-taiko/Event?oid=1845781>

<http://www.placestogoinpittsburgh.com/events/531087-TOMODACHI-Ties-Through-Taiko-Concert/>

<http://pennsylvasia.blogspot.com/2015/07/tomodachi-ties-through-taiko-concert.html>

City Hall Performance

<https://twitter.com/welcomingpgh/status/630887496931504128>

<https://www.facebook.com/WelcomingPGH/videos/vb.313260452209509/424211811114372/?type=2&theater>

<https://www.facebook.com/WelcomingPGH/posts/424218444447042>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C5Tv7tKrYdE>

Carnegie Mellon University Visit

<https://www.facebook.com/heinzcollege/photos/a.81015656661.81171.48298236661/10153085891331662/?type=1&theater>

<https://www.facebook.com/heinzcollege/posts/10153136814841662>

<http://www.heinz.cmu.edu/news/news-detail/index.aspx?nid=2793>

Manchester Craftsmen's Guild

<http://mcgyouthandarts.org/tomodachi-ties-through-taiko-2015>

Nihon Fukushi Affiliated High School Blog

<http://blog.n->

fukushi.ac.jp/koukou/category/%E3%82%AF%E3%83%A9%E3%83%96%E6%B4%BB%E5%8B%95/%E5%92%8C%E5%A4%AA%E9%BC%93%E9%83%A8%EF%BD%9E%E6%A5%BD%E9%BC%93%EF%BD%9E/