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OCA REPORT

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JULY, 2017 WORLD ONIGIRI FRIENDS PROJECT



World "ONIGIRI" Friends Project

"Onigiri" means "rice ball".

Rice balls are Japanese soul food. Everyone has eaten them at least once! As you make rice balls enjoying each ingredient you like, you can make this project interesting and unique with your various ideas. This is why we made up this name.

This is how the "ONIGIRI" Friends Project was born

Nice to meet you, this is Yuka Shimabayashi, the founder of the project. Last year I participated in the American International Educational Organization Up with People (UWP) program. I went to various countries and met lots of people. Especially the time spent with host families all over the world was irreplaceable.

Meeting a person with a culture and values different from yourself creates "discoveries" and "richness" in your life. I wanted to make it happen in Japan! The project has begun by inviting the UWP alumni to do such activities.

Preparation was tough but fun!

I immediately decided where to go. Tokyo - which is the center of Japan, Ishinomaki - where volunteered for two years after the disaster. The time period is about 2 weeks - from 7/21 to 8/3. First, I decided a rough schedule and looked for cast members who could participate. Taking advantage of social networking, we asked our Japanese alumni to cooperate and called on friends who traveled together in UWP using Facebook. What I noticed was that there were many more people who wanted to come to Japan than I thought. Those who are from UWP know that there are many who are interested in participating in a "Mystery Tour" (laugh).

Eventually, it took about a month to decide the participants. Eleven people gathered from 7 countries, 2 from the US, 3 from Mexico, 2 from Germany, 1 from the Netherlands, 1 from Belgium, 1 from China and 1 from Sweden. All were between 20 and 30 years old and all women.

As the cast members were determined, the required number of host families became clear, and two weeks before the program started, the 19 host family members gathered together in Tokyo and Ishinomaki! I truly appreciated that there were people involved in Common Beat and UWP alumni. Since I also wanted some people who had never been host families, I recruited families who did not speak English. I said to them that you can communicate with foreigners - not in words but with your heart, too.

The cooperation was great!

Initially I was trying to do it by myself, but unexpectedly people from various fields cooperated. The NPO, MRA house gave us a lot of financial support. The NPO Common Beat helped me with lots of missing parts, such as cooperation to find host families and accounting know-how.

Also I gathered staff members in Japan. Because I lived in Kagoshima, I had two people in Tokyo, two in Ishinomaki, and one in Kagoshima as a treasurer.



The program has started ! !

Because every day was full and I can't write everything here, I will report it roughly.

First, I really wanted to show the Common Beat musical performance to the cast members. Since I thought it would be a waste just to watch it, I requested to have some songs we could sing together with Common Beat. Onigiri cast members were moved to tears realizing that the songs they sang around the world were so familiar in different languages in different countries. Some said that the time was so peaceful, and warm and they felt the power.

I asked my friend to lecture various aspects of Japanese culture on such as the Japanese language and Yosakoi experience. The week in Tokyo passed so quickly.



Performance

Essential to the rice ball project is the "performance". I wanted to create various interactions through music with an original performance by the cast. Production time was only few hours. Various opinions were raised, but in the end it was based on the theme "We are gathering from different countries to become one by transcending cultural differences and finding common values in a spirit" We made an original performance of 20 to 30 minutes. Unlike when we were in UWP, there were difficulties in making everything by ourselves, but casting was quite exciting. We produced the best performance by making use of each individual's special talents and feeling.

We also performed at an exchange party with a children's musical team and at a big party of 50 people on the final day in Tokyo. We had a very good time together with the participants. I realized that the power of music is amazing! It was also impressive that the children tried hard to speak English.



Aggressiveness of casts in Ishinomaki

In Ishinomaki, we learned a lot by going around the affected area, listening to the stories of the people working for the city and people. Among them, what I felt was that the casts were asking questions actively. Although they knew the facts of the earthquake, they were trying hard to know what has been done and how to reconstruct the area. Especially when we visited the Hyappyo-kan Museum, we shared ideas on how to create a community space where children and elderly people can enter and leave freely and exhibit the art of people in the city. The people of the Museum were very pleased to hear original ideas from the cast members. In addition, it seems that it was great for cast members to participate in the big local festival "Kawagoe Festival". They wore yukata and walked the streets, carried a portable shrine, and participated in the parade with songs that excited Ishinomaki! I felt very lucky that we had a local experience that we could not taste on a regular trip.



On the final day, we conducted an exchange performance at the sight of public housing reconstruction. The cast members learned that standing up from the sorrow of the disaster, rebuilding things is important, but connecting people to people and reviving the spirit of the heart is more important. We delivered a powerful performance. I was worried if people would come to our first event at the reconstruction public house. But so many residents came. Among those who came, some people said to me in tears, - "Recently sad things have happened, but I regained energy through your songs and dancing." Although it was a very small activity, I was really glad that the performance was able to reach people's hearts. The world is wide but close.

I greatly appreciate the encounter with Ishinomaki, which came through a lot of connections!

Impression of the people involved

(Tokyo host family: Miss. Y)

I lived with foreigners for the first time, and although communication was difficult, I really enjoyed it. I felt like I could be a real sister since I spent a week and I was able to smile the whole time. I want to participate again.

(Ishinomaki host family: Mr. O)

English speaking skill does not matter. The feeling is important. However, I was motivated to learn English to talk freely. Think Global. It was so good that both parents and children had a great experience.

(Cast: Ms. A)

It was very painful to touch on the disaster in Ishinomaki, but I was impressed with the people who got up from their sorrow. I think that the people of Ishinomaki are shining with heart and hope and compassion born of survival.

(Cast: Ms. S)

Both Tokyo and Ishinomaki were the best host families. I loved it! I wanted more time. I will come again.

(Staff: Ms. M)

The city feeling in Tokyo and the local gap in Ishinomaki were good. The River Open Festival was the best! The number of cast members and countries represented was good. It would be better to find a place where host families can pick up cast members more easily.

(Parent – children's musical)

It was impressive to see everyone seriously thinking about the future regardless of age or nationality. I would like to have such activities in various places. I realized how important it is to understand different cultures.



How about a future activity!!

By all means, I want to continue this activity! With this project as a trigger, there were host families who wanted to have more international exchanges, and some cast members said they wanted to come back to Japan again. I think that these small activities will create a society that will bring about future world peace cross-cultural experience.

Of course, there were various incidents. There was a cast member who joined us late because the visa acquisition did not go well and the transportation by train in Tokyo was very difficult (The cast member had been doing their best everyday with the support of the host family!), the schedule was too tight with free time.

I believe that the first Rice Ball Project was a great success. Next time the participants and schedule will be different, and I believe it will be a more interesting project based on this experience. I want to make it an interesting project connecting music with Japan and the world by holding a workshop which UWP is doing, and events involving host families.

Thank you very much to everyone involved this time!

Next time, you can be involved in making this project more interesting!!!

In addition, thank you for your continued support!

Schedule of Onigiri Project

July 21	Cast members reach Japan and go to host families.
22	Go to see the Common Beat Tokyo Performance
23	Host Family Day
24	Japanese Language Classes, Calligraphy Experience
25	Exchange program with Kodomo Musical
26	Visit Meiji Shrine, Harajuku Welcome Party
27	Move from Shinjuku to Ishinomaki. Meet host families
28	Visit the affected area
29	Volunteer activity in Ishinomaki
30	Host Family Day
31	A meeting to hear about Ishinomaki Reconstruction activities Floating lanterns on the water
August, 1	Participating in a thinking back meeting and River Opening Festival
2	Exchange meeting with locals. Move from Ishinomaki to Shinjuku
3	Dismiss in Shinjuku



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2017 World ONIGIRI Friends Project

Participants



Ale
Alejandra Hernandez
Mexico
Cast B14



Ellen
Ellen Fierens
Belgium
Cast A/B16



Giulia
Giulia Hahne
Germany
Cast B14



Jennifer
Jennifer Brown
Sweden
Cast A16



Jialu
Jialu Pang
China
Cast A16



Jime
Jime Silvia Rey
Mexico
Cast B14/A15



Julia
Julia Brandes
Germany
Friend of Giulia



Melanie
Melanie Jean
USA
Cast A16



Norma
Norma Saucedo
Mexico
Host Family



Sam
Samantha Mary
USA
Cast A16



Tess
Tess Zondervan
Netherlands
Cast A16

2017 World ONIGIRI Friends Project

Tokyo Staff



Mika
Mika Tsubota
坪田 后加
Cast A13



Momo
Momoko Hoshino
星野 桃子
Cast B14/A15

Tohoku Staff



Irene
Akiko Kawaguchi
川口 暁子
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Dera
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Ai
Ai Imai
今井 藍
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Yuka
Yuka Shimabayashi
島林 由香
Cast A16/B16