

23 October 2002

Leaders Report Kurashiki Youth Exchange 2002

It is with pleasure that I present this report following the very successful youth exchange visit to Kurashiki Japan.

Before embarking on a programme of this kind it is important to revisit the objectives and the reasons for its being.

Such a programme is not simply about a visit to a different culture and the enjoyment of different experiences.

It is not about being told what to do and it is not about being led or directed.

It is about team spirit, responsibility and the development of self-confidence,

It is about self-recognition and personal pride.

It is about working together and taking responsibility for self and others.

And it is about emerging as a better person, more focused, more worldly, more aware and more conscious of ourselves and others, and more aware of our place of being than when we began.

It is about personal growth through experience in an arena of trust and security that still allows for challenge, and an acknowledgement of calculated risk.

It is about being a player on the field rather than a spectator in the stand and it is about going the extra mile for yourself as well as others.

.....and what better way to do it than immersion into a very different culture, a long way from home, where the experiences would be a blend of civic and recreational, and where world places of history would blend with amusement parks and shopping malls, where shinkansens and 767's would become common place, and where the responsibility of being an ambassador for your city would be as much a daily part of your life as the rice, raw fish and noodles of the daily diet.....

So with all this in mind a group of 14 was selected and a programme of preparation begun.

For me it was my third time to Japan and my second time to Kurashiki.

For Pip it was her first and with her daughter turning five and starting school in her absence the trip in itself had special challenges.

The selection of students followed a deliberate pattern based on application and interview as we looked to form a team that would represent Christchurch in the spirit intended as well as being members who would gel together in the times that would follow. We also looked for people who would personally benefit, who were self-starters and who had an X factor that is hard to describe.

Over two weeks of staggered interviews (broken because of time I was in Thailand) our group was formed and a programme of preparation commenced.

The programme was predetermined in time and content to allow for essential information to be given, for the team to get to know each other, and for parents and the team to get to know Pip and me. Deliberately the meetings were kept formal and with structure, and at times involving guest speakers, as the 16 of us got to know each other, and as responsibilities became apparent.

Throughout it was our intention to develop a spirit of collegiality and support and a situation of trust and responsibility. By doing so we knew that long before the departure date we had a team that was

totally dependable, fun to be with and where we all respected each other and the various responsibilities we all had.

Uniforms supplied and subsidized by Canterbury Apparel were decided on, and totally funded by Pub Charities allowed the team to present in a very functional but smart manner.

..and so it was that a team departed for Kansai on an early morning flight with a mixture of apprehension, nervousness and excitement, but each knowing that they were valued and could do it.....

Every trip has its challenges and the loss or theft of a passport and tickets 5 minutes after arrival provided extra effort as we worked through the replacement process, however this was in itself a learning opportunity which everyone gained something from. And on a more painful note the squashing of a toe in a school gymnasium tested the medical system and insurance process, as well as drawing the team closer together as they ensured their team member was supported and looked after.

The programme was a good mixture of school, civic and other activities and this coupled with individual homestay experiences provided the arena for the wider experience of which we were all part.

The welcome by Mayor Nakada, the Civic luncheon and appearance on television three times indicated the esteem of the visit but nothing could match the generosity of the host families and the commitment and time of the international office at City Hall.

It was sad that Sam was no longer there but his replacement Bill Goudrie and colleague and friend Keiko Onishi provided unparalleled support and assistance as they guided us through the two weeks and saw us safely on our way.

Gratitude must also be expressed to the host schools for their care and kindness in looking after our students and for the effort they went to in establishing specific programmes to make their time interesting and enjoyable.

The Highlands Amusement Park allowed the G forces to kick in and the adrenalin to rush but nothing was more sobering than the Hiroshima Peace Park and all it represented.

...the cranes were laid, the thoughts were thought, and nothing needed to be said, as we emerged and stood where history was shaped and so many paid the price.....

Without any doubt or exception I can honestly say I am incredibly lucky and privileged to have been part of this team.

There was never a cross word, a moment of tension or a reason for doubt or concern.

Every member of this team represented themselves and their families as well as their city in a manner they can always be proud of.

They were a pleasure to be with. They were fun loving, respectful and energetic.

And when the going was a bit tough through things such as homesickness they rose to the occasion and they all emerged better people.

Air New Zealand crew on the way there and back summed it all up when they remarked that in all their experience had they seldom seen a group looking so smart, and although enjoying themselves, being so respectful and such a pleasure to have on board.

I commend the city councils of Christchurch and Kurashiki for the way this programme is supported and express the wish that it grows and continues in the way it was intended.

Finally I wish to thank my partner and co leader Pip Smith.

Pip provided a down to earth approach to care as well as an attention to organizational detail that comes from a background of self-sufficiency and family support so necessary in the High Country and remoter areas of New Zealand.

We all knew she would "be there", that she could be relied on, and that she understood.

Together we all combined to be a team in the truest sense

And together the objectives were met

Recommendations

1. That the Hiroshima day is planned to give the greatest possible time at the Peace Park
2. That consideration is given to a change of accommodation at Okayama even if it means an increase in price. Students could also share rooms for personal and emotional safety.
3. That the Christchurch International Office reviews its processes relating to inbound and outbound groups.
This review should center on the philosophical reasons for the programmes, leader preparedness, responsibilities and checks and balances.
The standards, I believe, should at least be the same as expected in any educational institution with every aspect of safety adhered to.

Notes to accompany financial statements.

1. Recommend that leaders are paid a one off allowance for meals and expenses.
2. Note for budgeting that Kansai tax no longer exists.
3. That leaders have access to a reasonable contingency fund available if required.
4. Surplus funds from this trip be tagged specifically for this outbound youth exchange to meet any group or individual shortfall that may arise.
5. Propose that members of this and other outbound teams receive a special certificate for their involvement. This to be presented by the Mayor or his representative.

It should be noted that there will be a few expenses still to come as final reimbursements are made.

Finally:

With technological/banking advancement in Kurashiki I question the need to take all the funds in cash. (\$13000 or 600 000 yen)

While there is some advantage in having all the funds in cash it does create an element of risk and one which everyone may not feel comfortable with.

I suggest this is also reviewed along with the areas noted above.

Richard Paton