

Air New Zealand Sister Cities 2006 Awards Category One Youth Education or School Project



Contact Information

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Kurashiki Sister City Committee**

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Executive Summary

In February 2005 the first Sister City youth with disability exchange took place between the Sister Cities of Christchurch and Kurashiki in Japan. This project promotes an exciting and new initiative between Christchurch and Kurashiki. Sponsored by Independent Fisheries and supported by the Christchurch Kurashiki Sister Committee, The KiwiAble programme, Christchurch City Council, Sport Canterbury and the Halberg Trust, this project promotes an exciting and new initiative between the two Sister Cities. The exchange adopts an inclusive approach enabling people with disabilities from another culture to participate in and enjoy activities with a physical activity and sport focus. It is also an opportunity for a cultural exchange.

To commence the new venture two students and their caregivers arrived in Christchurch from Kurashiki on February 13 for a 13 day experience that would leave a lasting impression on everyone involved and strengthen our already strong Sister City ties. Hirokaki Oshima (21) was classified as having a minor intellectual disability and Mitsunobu Hirata (23) a physical disability. Both students had caregiver support.

To prepare for this exchange representatives from Independent Fisheries, Christchurch Kurashiki Sister City Committee, The KiwiAble Programme and Sport Canterbury and the Halberg Trust, met regularly to coordinate and plan. Kurashiki set up a Disabled Persons International Exchange Association consisting of the 4 main disabled persons organisations in the Kurashiki area. This group was created specifically to manage the Kurashiki side of the exchange.

During the exchange the students took part in range of activities, including The New Zealand Wheelchair Tennis Open, being linked with Papanui High School to participate in the school activities and a home stay. With Christchurch having such a strong philosophy of inclusion for people with disabilities one of the aims included showing the students around the sights of greater Christchurch and how people with disabilities are included in sport and physical activity. This was displayed at the Christchurch Swimming Championships held at QE11 where students with disabilities are included and participate alongside other participants. This was a real education for our Japanese visitors who had not experienced inclusion at this level. It seems there are minimal programmes and opportunities for participation in mainstream sport or physical activity.

Links were forged with educational establishments such as Canterbury University and The Christchurch Polytechnic who offered their students the opportunity to be involved as translators. This was a wonderful experience for those involved, and opened their eyes to looking at ability and not disability.

After the exchange an evaluation process took place with all parties involved. This consultation included valuable input into addressing the challenges that may lie ahead as we commence planning to send two students from Christchurch to Kurashiki in April 2006. New Zealand is moving forward from exclusion into a fully inclusive and supportive society while Japan it seems, does not have the same structures and support systems in place for people with disabilities.

This is the beginning of breaking new ground, empowering people with disabilities and strengthening the links between Kurashiki and Christchurch by providing a unique learning experience for both communities.

We have shown that we can make a difference to both communities. We have started to lay the foundations for future youth with disabilities exchange programmes by setting up partnerships. Achieving this vision will create strong links that will pave the way for future successful youth with disabilities exchange programmes.

“Christchurch as a city responds well to the special needs of disabled people in ways that would be unthinkable here in Japan”, (Ms Keiko Uneda, caregiver for Mitsunobu Hirata)



Objectives

The exchange was initiated to achieve the following objectives:

- To break new ground in Christchurch and Japan where this type of exchange is the first of its kind, both regionally and nationally
- To provide a reciprocal exchange opportunity for youth with disabilities that has a sport and physical activity focus
- To empower students with disabilities to independently make choices
- To provide a lifetime experience that will never be forgotten
- To create a barrier free trip that is based on providing accessible and inclusive activities
- To maintain a partnership and ongoing commitment with the main sponsor, Independent Fisheries
- To enable youth with disabilities to be involved in the leisure lifestyle of the community
- To provide an entry to fully inclusive and accessible leisure experiences that in turn raises the profile and image of youth with disabilities.
- To increase confidence, levels of achievement and self esteem of the participants
- To assist the participants to further develop social and life skills, feel part of our community and build relationships
- To promote a philosophy of inclusion based on the social model of disability
- To brighten the lives and broaden the choices of the students who would otherwise be limited in a physical activity or sporting opportunity
- To develop and strengthen positive social relationships
- To promote educational experiences
- To use this exchange as a way of developing awareness of disabilities in the wider community
- To support The New Zealand Disability Strategy, objective 9 – “Support lifestyle choices, recreation and culture for disabled people” and objective 13 – “Enable disabled children and youth to lead full and active lives”
- To recognise the students with disabilities emerging identities and reinforce their sense of self

“the exchange is to offer young people with disabilities a chance to experience full cultural immersion. There is nothing that can compare with living in a different culture to widen your view of the world” (Kevin McDonnell, Independent Fisheries Director)

Activity Details

Christchurch has a very strong philosophy of inclusion for people with disabilities in the community. The aim was to show the students around the sights of greater Christchurch and illustrate how people with disabilities are included in sport and physical activity. It was also an opportunity for the students to try some of these inclusive experiences which may not be available to them in Japan. Both students were very enthusiastic and wanted to participate in the activities we made available to them.

A timetable of events was organised that would provide a unique learning experience. The itinerary included the following events and activities:

- A civic welcome at Christchurch City Council

This included all the major sponsors, those involved in preparing and planning the exchange, City Councillors, the Deputy Mayor, Christchurch City Council Unit Managers and members of the Kurashiki Sister Committee.



(Hiroaki presenting the Deputy Mayor, Carol Evans with a piece of art work from Kurashiki)

- A home stay experience
- A placement at the KimiOra Unit, Papanui High School

The unit included one of the exchange students in their weekly activities. It was a great opportunity to participate with local students, exchange stories, and learn about different life styles and cultures in a school environment. It also involved Hiroaki Oshima experiencing his first challenge ropes course, designed to allow persons with disabilities to participate in an adventure setting in a safe and challenging way.

- To compete at the New Zealand Wheelchair Tennis Open (Mitsunobu Hirata entered this tournament which was a 5 day event)
- To be hosted at various homes of Christchurch Kurashiki Committee members
- To experience many of the city attractions such as Gondola, Cathedral, Willowbank, Sister City Gardens, Art Centre, Summer Times Festival events etc.
- Visit to Greymouth on the Trans Alpine Express, Akaroa Hanmer
- Being a part of the Canterbury Secondary School Swimming Championships
- Visiting The Southern Centre, a multi sensory environment where children and adults of all abilities can explore the exciting interactive equipment



Resources

The Youth with Disability Exchange Programme was sponsored by Independent Fisheries and supported by The Christchurch Kurashiki Sister City Committee, the KiwiAble programme, Christchurch City Council, Sport Canterbury and The Halberg Trust. Independent Fisheries funded the cost of the flights and ground costs of this exchange programme. Others volunteered their time and energy to making this exchange a success.

The costs included:

- Travel costs to cover two students and their caregivers from Kurashiki, Japan to Christchurch, New Zealand and return
- Excursion costs e.g. visit to Hanmer Springs, Transalpine Express, Akaroa
- New Zealand Wheelchair Tennis Open fees
- Translator costs (we were able to access students via the University and Polytechnic)
- Accommodation (motel and meal costs)

EXPENDITURE	AMOUNT
Flights, \$2,500.00 x 2 (2 flights were donated by Air New Zealand)	\$5,000.00
Excursions	\$1,663.30
Taxi's (in some cases wheelchair taxi's)	\$348.00
Translators	\$550.00
Accommodation and meals associated with the motel stay	\$2,385.00
Wheelchair Tennis Open fees	\$200.00
TOTAL COST OF THE YOUTH WITH DISABILITY EXCHANGE PROGRAMME: \$10,146.30	



Community Participation

***“the atmosphere at the tennis tournament was very different from that of the tournaments back home and this was a valuable experience for me”
(Mitsunobu Hirata, student)***

The Youth with Disability Exchange Programme stimulated involvement in our community in many ways, these included:

- Highlighting our barrier free environment
 - Increased disability awareness – the exchange was a project that advocated inclusion
 - Attitude is the biggest barrier for people with disabilities; this project broke down some of the myths that are often associated with people with disabilities
 - The preparation and planning of the school visit at Papanui Special unit. The students were given projects to investigate beforehand such as finding out information about the city of Kurashiki and Japan in general. This aided education awareness for the students of that unit.
 - Liaising with Canterbury University and the Christchurch Polytechnic to involve students who would like to have an opportunity of being involved in this unique exchange as a translator
 - To liaise with the KiwiAble Recreation Network, 120 disability agencies were all made aware of this exchange and it’s potential. It was also an opportunity to share with the network the barriers that people with disabilities face in Japan
 - The New Zealand Wheelchair Tennis Open – the organisers of this tournament included Mitsunobu in all of the events associated with this tournament.
 - With all those involved in making this exchange happen came excellent teamwork, commitment and community development at its best
 - Friendships that were made

“I was deeply moved by the warm welcome our group received at the airport in Christchurch. I was pleasantly surprised by the number of people there to greet us”(Mitsunobu Hirata, student)



Awareness

The Disabled Youth Exchange 2005 gave an opportunity for disabled youth from Kurashiki to experience first hand the inclusive nature of life with a disability in New Zealand.

This exchange inevitably enhanced the awareness and understanding of Sister City activities in our community and has paved the way for reciprocal awareness in ongoing exchanges between our two countries:

Awareness has been enhanced as follows

- The exchange involved huge numbers of people who had previously had nothing to do with Christchurch Kurashiki Sister City Network and in many cases did not know it existed. The exchange has therefore made large numbers of Christchurch people more aware of Kurashiki Japan and our Sister City movement.
- Two students and two caregivers who previously knew nothing of New Zealand and life as a disabled person in New Zealand, have now had first hand experience and have returned to Kurashiki to promote Christchurch and ultimately New Zealand. This centres around not only Christchurch as a cultural opportunity but also more particularly as a ground breaker in the inclusive approach to disabilities.
- There is opportunity for further learning and strengthening of Sister City ties as two people from Christchurch visit Kurashiki in 2006 to experience life in Japan as a disabled person.
- The exchange fosters the opportunity for the sharing of resources and knowledge
- It provides an opportunity for Christchurch and Kurashiki to offer each other advice and support with inclusive opportunities in both communities.
- This exchange will enable us to promote initiatives such as The Southern Centre, multi sensory environment in Kurashiki.
- It enables us to share training and education practices and look at best practice models.

As previously stated this exchange has laid the foundation for further disability exchange programmes and has set up valuable partnerships which will be enhanced in the future.



Benefits

The Youth with Disabilities Exchange Programme was a facilitated exchange between two Sister Cities and has fostered knowledge, learning and participation.

This exchange has brought about awareness, not only in enabling the participants to experience a different culture, but also finding out the difference in the way people with disabilities are viewed and included in the community. Our visitors from Kurashiki returned to Japan with excited talk about Christchurch and New Zealand and will have passed on their experiences to a number of Japanese people.

Sharing and learning has strengthened the links between Kurashiki and Christchurch. As we prepare for two students with disabilities from Christchurch to visit Kurashiki in April 2006 we are confident of another successful exchange.

