

DISABLED YOUTH EXCHANGE

16-29 MARCH 2010



REPORT

BY

TANIA MCKENZIE

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Participants

Ryan Burnett - 16
Caregiver – **Annette Burnett** (Mum)

Erin Gough – 18
Caregiver – **Gina Bolton** (family friend)

Tania McKenzie – Project Supervisor



Air Travel

All Air New Zealand staff both in Christchurch and at Kansai were fantastic. They were extremely attentive and had no problems letting us board early and arranging aisle chairs for Erin. At each stop a wheelchair was supplied without delay and we were escorted

through the airport both at Auckland and at Kansai on both trips which made it easier on all of us.

Osaka

The midnight flight out of Auckland was not ideal however the decision to leave the arrival day free was a good one. We didn't end up resting for long as after lunch we chose to visit the Aquarium for the afternoon. The Aquarium was a great spot.

Great for everyone to see a little bit of Osaka and the stay at the Hyatt gave everyone a great start as it is certainly a lovely Hotel. I recommend we continue to have the Osaka "lay over" as it eases the students and caregivers in to the busy schedule ahead.

The next day we visited Universal Studios. The tickets should ideally be pre-booked and paid either before we leave home or at least the day before through the Hotel facility. We turned up without tickets and spent more time than I would have liked waiting in line. It needs to be remembered that you spend a lot of time queuing for the rides so less time queuing at the entrance means more fun inside. We had a great day and did the Spider Man ride, Back to the Future, and Jurassic Park. The hour long plus wait for each ride meant they were the only rides we could fit in but there were plenty of other activities, shops and shows to keep us entertained.

Accommodation in Kurashiki

We stayed at Kurashiki Kokusai Hotel. It was the first time for our disabled exchange participants to stay at that hotel. We had an initial hiccup as Erin and Gina ended up in a room with a tiny bathroom that was extremely inaccessible. I managed to resolve that the next day with the help of James and Shirakawa san and they moved to a larger room where they could at least negotiate their way into the bathroom to use the shower chair.

Provided we can secure that room for any future wheel chair participants there should be no problems. The wheel chair participant would need to be able to transfer onto a shower chair as there is only a bath with a shower head attached over the bath.

Aside from the initial hiccup the hotel was great. The staff were lovely and very accommodating and the location was perfect being right on the Bikan. Breakfast was included in the room price which made it nice and simple.

Length of the Exchange

The length of the exchange was about right. If anything one more day in Kurashiki would have been perfect. Taking into account the new flight times we need to make sure we

have the arrival day in Osaka, followed by the next day at USJ and then 9-10 full days in Kurashiki. That means we can make the most of our time in Kurashiki. An extra day could have perhaps meant an extra home stay night?.

Itinerary

The itinerary was great. There was a good balance of visits to disabled facilities coupled with cultural visits. There was a definite emphasis on facilities for people with intellectual disabilities but we could see first hand the advances for people with physical disabilities eg: the provision of special tiles on the street for people who are sight impaired. Probably the most impressive detail from everyone's perspective was the fact that at each and every train station we were greeted by a staff member with a special fold out ramp for Erin's wheelchair. At each station someone would obviously radio ahead and when we arrived at each stop another man would be in the right place waiting for us to disembark with another ramp and then escort us to the next point.

We had the following events on our itinerary:

Civic Welcome

Tour of City Hall

Afternoon at Kurashiki School for the Disabled

Bikan area including Ohara museum and shops

Tatsumi Community Centre for Bichu Kagura and Wadaiko

Welfare Hall – Fujien

Hiroshima and Miyajima

Mizushima Automotive Factory Visit

Asahi Kasei Tour

Tour of Kurashiki Health and Welfare Plaza – state of the art facility providing specifically for people with disabilities.

Wheelchair Basketball

Aeon – shopping

In addition, we were able to factor in some impromptu activities. The lantern festival was on so we cut out our own chosen designs which were stuck on one of the lanterns as part of the festival.

We also had invitations for dinner out. One night the group was taken out for dinner by a music teacher from one of the groups while I was hosted by Mr Miyake, at his home for a wonderful banquet attended by James and Mariko and Mike Gorman, among others. We also had a lovely lunch and some time with James and Mariko.

The day we were to head off with our host families we all got to punt down the Kurashiki River in the Bikan area. We also got to have a go at making omochi in the street and then

went to a community hall where we watched a music group perform and then got to join in. That was a really magic day.

Home stays

The home stays were a definite highlight for everyone. We had an afternoon, a night and a full day with our host families and we all agree it would be worth having two nights with host families if possible.

Ryan and Annette stayed with the Onishi family. Misaki visited Christchurch in 2007. Erin and Gina stayed with the Okamoto family. Yoshie visited Christchurch last year. I stayed with the Mori family who hosted me in 2003 and have also visited me in New Zealand.

Both the Onishi's and Okamoto's arranged translators. The real testament to how successful this exchange can be is that one of the translators for Okamoto's was Kotoe who was one of the volunteers in Christchurch for the exchange last year. Isn't it funny how things go full circle!!

The Mori family took me to see the Bicchu Kokubunji temple on the first afternoon. On day 2 we headed to Naoshima Island where I experienced the most amazing galleries and art houses – Chi Chu Art Museum, Benesse House and the Benesse Art Site. They also made sure I had plenty of Mr Donuts in my tummy and extra kilos around my middle to bring home.

Translators

We had a regular stream of translators who provided us with invaluable assistance. Occasionally, the translators own command of the English language was not 100% which meant some things were not translated at all and others were not very clear. However all the translators were lovely and eager to learn about us and New Zealand and help out where they could to the best of their abilities.

At times it would have been helpful to have 2 translators as it was difficult for one person to try and cope with all our questions and if we were in two cars it meant one car was without a translator.

Transport

The travel to Kurashiki was an event in itself. Tickets had to be purchased and we ended up having to take about 4 trains to get there. We were also travelling at peak times without reserve seats. I would recommend the train tickets are pre-booked in future to

avoid travelling at peak time without reserve seats. Perhaps we could use MAK as we do with the student exchange and then we know they are booked and paid for before we leave home.

The idea for the return trip to Kansai was for us to be put on the train at Kurashiki and left to navigate our way back to Kansai. I flagged with James early on my concerns about that and requested that someone at the very least take us to Okayama and then ensure we were met by an assistant at each station. James worked his magic and that happened which meant there were no issues other than me concentrating on each of the stations so we knew when to disembark. The Airport was easy to negotiate once we reunited with our luggage.

It is too difficult to expect the group to try and navigate train stations without assistance. There is the extra burden of needing to know where lifts are and where to go and what to do when there is a language problem. Therefore it is important that assistance is available to take the group from Osaka to Kurashiki and then someone from Kurashiki going at least to Okayama. The group commented that they felt at least reassured with me there and would not have felt comfortable at all if they were by themselves.

Travel in Kurashiki was usually by car and we used at least two cars for that purpose. Occasionally we would have a wheel chair accessible vehicle for Erin however it wasn't really necessary as she was able to transfer from wheel chair to vehicle without too much difficulty.

Again I would recommend pre-booking return train tickets for the major journey. On the day we left it was difficult for me trying to say goodbye to everyone when I had to go and purchase tickets for the train. Also pre-booking ensures timing is correct to get to and from the airport.

Transport to and from Hiroshima was not ideal. We travelled in a wheelchair accessible vehicle. The vehicle however only catered for a driver, two wheelchairs and 3 passengers. As there were two drivers it meant that one of us had to ride in the small pull down "jump seat" which was not very comfortable for a long journey. Another had to sit in a wheelchair which they put in to create another seat. Annette and I shared the jump seat and wheelchair. Although we had a few laughs about it, from a safety and comfort perspective it wasn't ideal. Also travelling by bus makes for a very long day as we left at 7.20am and didn't get back until 9pm at night. The more time spent travelling also means less time in Hiroshima and Miyajima.

The train would be more expensive and that cost would not be met by Kurashiki but it is perhaps something to consider. Alternatively a more comfortable bus may need to be secured in the future.

Networking

I had a very enlightening and successful meeting with members of KPDIEA and also the Health and Disability Minister and members of City Hall. Everyone agreed the exchange is worthwhile and are humbled by the generosity and financial support offered by Independent Fisheries. I was repeatedly asked that I convey their gratitude to Charles Shadbolt of Independent Fisheries.

All parties appreciated the opportunity to meet with me and review the exchange. They were grateful for the work that myself and others have put in to the exchange. They felt it was beneficial for the group to have a “tour leader” but said budget constraints meant they could not fund a tour leader on the visits to Christchurch.

There has been a fundamental shift in Government policy on the issue of people with disabilities in the last 5 years. There is now a real focus on ensuring people with disabilities are catered for. Government policy is now that companies with a certain number of employees must hire a certain percentage of employees with a disability. In fact, the visit to Asahi Kasei was for the purpose of us visiting the offices where people with both intellectual and physical disabilities are employed to do a variety of tasks.

At Fujien, we saw people with intellectual disabilities involved in a number of tasks with a view to preparing them for employment.

The involvement of Kotoe in Kurashiki who assisted with the exchange in Christchurch is another example of how this sister city exchange has fostered such positive relationships.

I was overwhelmed when Hirokaki Oshima (2005) turned up at our Hotel to see me and brought examples of his art and his portfolio to show me. He returned the next day with gifts for everyone and seems very happy and has wonderful memories of his trip to Christchurch in 2005.

Misaki, Yoshie and their families were heavily involved in this years exchange. The involvement of past participants to Christchurch was a great experience for everyone. I think this is something we need to work on in Christchurch. When we interview prospective applicants we should impress upon them the need to be involved in assisting with and hosting the Japanese visitors on their next visit. I am confident that both Ryan and Erin will want to be involved in some way in the future.

At the farewell party I had a reunion with Mistunobu Hirata (2005) who is now working for City Hall. Airi Hayashi (2007) walked in without her wheelchair and was very proud to tell me that she now has her drivers' license.

The past Japanese visitors to Christchurch were still bursting with energy over their visits to Christchurch and were happily sharing their stories together.

As I said in my speech – the highlight for me was the farewell party, watching everyone enjoying each others company. It was wonderful to see people from two different countries and cultures coming together as friends sharing memories and enjoying each others company. (Yes it was rather emotional).

Recommendations

The recommendations are a combination of things that I saw and thought of and also comments made by the group

- Pre book and pay for train tickets from Osaka to Kurashiki and vice versa
- Pre book and pay for tickets to USJ
- Retain two days in Osaka depending on flights to visit Aquarium and USJ
- Either travel to Hiroshima by train (pre- booked and paid) or ensure transport is suitable for all passengers
- Participants to be given the option of creating and laminating their own business cards to use on the exchange.
- Name cards around our necks were a good idea
- Ensure that the accessibility of bathroom amenities is suitable for the wheelchair participant. Accommodation may vary depending on mobility of wheelchair participant and availability of the larger room at Kokusai. Hotel.
- Luggage to be sent through in advance. This means each person needs a backpack to have essentials for the time spent without the main suitcase.
- Remember that if luggage goes to airport two days early most shopping needs to be done by then and need to be mindful of gifts given at farewell party
- Gifts – we had it right but you need lots of them. I took care of gifts for important people and there were lots of bags of mini chocolates for school/community visits. Need to investigate fully before heading to Kurashiki to ensure you are not caught short. Also need to be prepared for things that happen that are not on the schedule.
- The group feels it is preferable for a leader to travel to assist generally with any potentially stressful situations, explain cultural aspects, managing the finances, negotiating the travel. Certainly they all said it would have been a daunting experience without me.
- If there is no team leader then a designated person needs to handle the finances. It can be difficult as receipts are not always given and all receipts given must be written on at the time as well as those not receipted noted in a book for recording in one book at the end of each day.
- Two nights with home stays would be preferable if possible as the home stays are a highlight.
- Ensure wherever possible that translators are able to provide maximum assistance and have previous experience with translating. On some occasions two translators would have been helpful
- Length of exchange was right. The two days in Osaka gave some time to recover from the flight.
- Itinerary is great but perhaps shift the Asahi Kasei visit to earlier in the programme.
- Farewell party was a great idea as it brought everyone together who assisted with the current exchange but also previous exchange participants.

Thank you to Ryan and Erin and Annette and Gina for making the trip such an enjoyable experience. They were fantastic ambassadors for disabled people, for Christchurch and indeed for New Zealand.

Thank you to Independent Fisheries for their ongoing financial support

Thank you to members of the Christchurch Kurashiki Sister City Committee for supporting such a worthwhile programme.

Thank you to James Benson, Mr Shirakawa and all the staff at Kurashiki City Hall for their assistance throughout the preparation of and during the exchange.

Thank you to members of KPDIEA for their generosity and day to day assistance and to everyone who helped make this exchange such a fantastic success.