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Building the TOMODACHI Generation

Summer Program Report - 2016

TOYOTA



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Summer Volunteer Program in Tohoku

2016 Building the TOMODACHI Generation

The Summer Volunteer Program in Tohoku engaged a total of 11 student participants—including six U.S. students and five Japanese counterparts—in visits to areas affected by the March 11, 2011 earthquake and tsunami. The learning objectives and activities emphasized first-hand, real-time interaction with leaders of civil society organizations involved in the reconstruction. Notetaking, reflection and discussion among students and local leaders provided insight to real-world challenges associated with implementing the students' proposed (and winning) team projects.

The six U.S. students from Team Ningyo and Team Tachiagare arrived in Japan on August 3, 2016 to reunite with five Japanese counterparts. (Two Japanese team members from the two winning project teams were unable to participate.) Once both teams were on the ground in Japan, they traveled to two towns in the Tohoku region—Onagawa and Kesennuma—featured in their (winning) projects. TWC and Common Earth worked collaboratively to identify the towns, which were devastated by the 2011 earthquake and tsunami. The teams' civil society projects focused on distinct topics, so TWC and Common Earth designed the programming in Tohoku to include both project-specific and generally applicable learning goals.

2016 Building the TOMODACHI Generation Tohoku Summer Program Participants

Team Ningyo | Onagawa, Miyagi | *Fishing for Hope*

- Mikaela Meyer, Regis University
- Roberto Torres, University of Puerto Rico
- Ryan Justice, University of New Hampshire
- Haruka Uedo, Kyoto University
- Haruko Sano, Sophia University
- Miki Hosaka, The University of Tokyo

Team Tachiagare | Kesennuma, Miyagi | *Kabe Night*

- Abby Kennefick, Fitchburg State University
- Christopher D'Elia, Monmouth University
- Paola Brignoni, University of Puerto Rico
- Hiroko Okutani, Kyoto University
- Yuki Nishimura, University of Tsukuba
- Kazumi Abe, Waseda University¹
- Ryo Saito, Ritsumeikan University²

In Onagawa and Kesennuma, the 11 participants gained a first-hand perspective on the full extent of the devastation caused by the earthquake and tsunami. They visited organizations that are currently involved in various aspects of the long-term recovery in areas that were relevant to their teams' projects. Through guided conversation and reflection, participants drew direct connections between their project proposals and real-world examples of civil society in action.

Building upon the 2014 and 2015 trips to Tohoku, the Summer 2016 program made even deeper connections between theory and practice because the winning project teams discussed their projects with the very stakeholders who could play vital roles in the implementation of such initiatives. Through meetings and many opportunities to

¹ Unable to participate in the summer program.

² Unable to participate in the summer program.

interact with local residents and community members, participants developed a heightened understanding of what implementing these kinds of programs truly entails—from navigating legal hurdles to winning over public support.

In Tokyo, the program culminated with an intimate meeting with several members of the Reconstruction Agency, the government bureau in charge of the reconstruction of the Tohoku region. The teams described the basic outlines of their projects and shared their experience in Tohoku and the various obstacles and challenges they identified. A casual Q&A with the representatives from the Reconstruction Agency gave even more context to the ongoing issues surrounding the reconstruction efforts in Tohoku.

Onagawa, Miyagi | August 4-6, 2016

Team Ningyo: *Fishing for Hope*

The Tsunami through the Eyes of Locals

After a long journey by bullet train, local train, and bus, the 11 participants' first experience in Tohoku was in the small fishing village of Onagawa. Their first guide in Onagawa was a young woman who was born and raised in Onagawa, who experienced the events of March 11, 2011 first-hand, and who worked as a *kataribe*. Kataribe is a storytelling tradition in Japan where the storytellers themselves are people who experienced the events that they are relaying to their audience. As the participants toured the extent of the destruction and ongoing reconstruction, their guide shared her story from that day. The tour concluded with a visit to Onagawa's newly rebuilt train station and shopping village, which were completed during reconstruction and are hoped to be an economic anchor for the community. Prior to participants' departure, the *kataribe* guide provided each participant with ¥300 in a special currency that can only be used within Onagawa – a strategy of the local business community to boost spending by tourists within Onagawa.

Following a brief break to shop for souvenirs and local food delicacies in the shopping village, participants then traveled to El Faro hotel. El Faro itself is an example of innovative economic development, and the program's first day in Tohoku ended with an interactive meeting with Mrs. Riko Sasaki, the hotel's owner. Mrs. Sasaki described the tragic story of her parents, who were killed in the March 11th tsunami and who owned a small *ryokan* before it was washed away in the tsunami. As a testament to their memory, she decided to start a hotel in Onagawa. She explained that during reconstruction, it was difficult to acquire land that would not, at some point in the future, be required to be raised to comply with new safety regulations. Recognizing the need for agility, she worked with the city to secure funding for trailer houses that would be used as hotel rooms and dining facilities for guests. This strategy made it possible for El Faro to be easily moved to a new location should construction on its current land become necessary. Participants asked Mrs. Sasaki questions about how she made this agreement with the city, learning from her innovative model.

Interacting with Local Stakeholders

In Onagawa, participants engaged with several leaders who could offer input that was both relevant to the specific scope of the Team Ningyo project and applicable generally to any civil society initiative. The first visit was to Fisherman Japan, a nonprofit organization dedicated to revitalizing interest in the fishing industry in the Sanriku area by making it more appealing to younger generations of Japanese.

Participants met with the founder of Fishermen Japan, and one of the local fishermen associated with the organization, on the shore of a picturesque bay just outside of central Onagawa. Fisherman Japan took the participants on the fishing boats to learn firsthand about the cultivation of *boya*. Participants learned about every step of the cultivation and harvesting process, and even had the opportunity to eat fresh *boya* straight from the sea! While out on the water, the founder of Fishermen Japan described the difficulties that the local *boya* industry has faced since South Korea banned the import of Japanese *boya* due to concerns of radiation contamination in the wake of Fukushima. The two teams learned about Fisherman Japan's efforts to expand the popularity of *boya* in areas of Japan outside of Tohoku in order to develop new markets for their products. After returning to shore, the teams and the fishermen enjoyed a seafood barbecue together while discussing various strategies to increase the popularity of *boya* in Tokyo and other major cities, as well as how to further develop the growth of Fisherman Japan.

The second component of the student team's *Fishing for Hope* project proposal is the partnership of local elementary and middle schools. Participants met with a teacher from Onagawa Elementary School and a member of the Onagawa board of education to discuss their project and learn about the feasibility of creating such initiatives within the current curriculum. For two hours, the group discussed the current landscape of education vis-à-vis local history, culture, and industries, as well as the multitude of obstacles that may stand in the way of

implementing a project similar to *Fishing for Hope*. These included conversations about funding structures within Japanese public education and the relative inflexibility of the education curriculum, adding more depth to their understanding of civil society in the Japanese context.

Giving Back to the Community

The group's time in Onagawa concluded with a visit to an old public school building that is currently being used by the organization Collabo School. This nonprofit works to close educational attainment gaps between rural children and those in larger metropolitan areas. Specifically within Tohoku, Collabo School provides mental support and a place to gather for children who have not only experienced the March 11th earthquake and tsunami, but continue to live in temporary housing and have lost most of their recreational areas due to temporary structures while reconstruction continues.

After a brief presentation on the history and mission of Collabo School from one of the organization's staff members, the Japanese and American participants worked together to create a miniature English lesson for one of the school's English classes. The two teams paired off with three to four students each and introduced themselves before playing a variety of English games designed by the teams beforehand. Initially shy, the students from Onagawa slowly came out of their shells as the games progressed. Despite the short time spent with the students, the experience put into perspective the reality of the ongoing problems within Tohoku as it struggles to fully recover, and put a human face on the potential impact of programs like *Fishing for Hope*.

Reflecting on Onagawa

In their Summer Program notebooks, students jotted down notes and responded to reflection prompts about the connection of each day's events to the learning objectives. Each day concluded with a group debrief session, during which participants discussed what they had learned from that day's activities and the obstacles and challenges that their project implementation could face. These reflection sessions were repeated throughout the program and served as a focal point of student learning.

Team Ningyo identified an obvious roadblock—the inflexibility of the Japanese educational curriculum. The curriculum devotes a small amount of time to education on local history and culture; however, the additional resources required of a project like *Fishing for Hope* seemed infeasible. Team Ningyo also learned from Fisherman Japan that trying to reach out to all children in order to increase interest in fishing as a profession was not ideal. In light of this increased understanding of the local dynamics in Onagawa, Team Ningyo came to the conclusion that their project would be more successful as a program independent of the public education system—one that focused on cultivating a deeper interest in the fishing industry and/or the development of new markets for local seafood products among students who already have an interest in these areas. As they reflected in their groups on how to improve the feasibility of their project, participants began to connect the dots between theory and practice.

“The biggest take away from this experience was that I realized that community development project without fully understanding the community itself will fail. The two weeks of studying civil society and project development in Washington, D.C. was quite valuable, but something even more valuable was hearing the stories of the locals and wanting to design a project for them. Although our project did not quite fit the real needs of the community, this experience transported me a higher level of understanding of community problem-solving. I want to contribute to the Tohoku reconstruction by implementing a project that has incorporates both theory and a human-centered approach.”

— Haruka Ueda, Team Ningyo, Kyoto University

Kesennuma, Miyagi | August 6-9, 2016

Team Tachiagare: *Kabe Night*

Connecting with Kesennuma's History and Culture

At the conclusion of an eventful two days in Onagawa, the American and Japanese participants travelled north by bus to the small city of Kesennuma. Upon their arrival, they were greeted by two high school students who worked together to create a guided English tour of Kesennuma as part of a mission to open Kesennuma's doors to visitors from all over the world. The two girls developed the itinerary together and this was their second time executing the tour.

The city tour began at the local museum of art where the group visited an exhibition on the ancient history of Kesennuma and a photo exhibition detailing the destruction caused by the tsunami in 2011. According to the guides, bringing visitors to these exhibitions serves as a foundation for understanding Kesennuma and its ongoing issues. The participants departed the museum and later arrived at the Sanriku Fukkou National Park, where they enjoyed the beautiful, rocky shoreline of Kesennuma and participated in a traditional salt making activity. The tour concluded with a short hike to the top of a nearby mountain overlooking the mountains and harbor of Kesennuma. The two guides concluded the tour by expressing their desire that the group experience Kesennuma not just through its tragedy, but through its nature and culture as well.

The groups were fortunate enough to be in Kesennuma during their annual harbor festival. After their first full day in Kesennuma, in which they spent a lot of time in meetings and volunteering with a local group of *kataribe* guides, the participants were able to relax and enjoy the culture of Tohoku through a traditional Japanese festival.

Interacting with Local Stakeholders

On the second and third days of their time in Kesennuma, the group met with a several local nonprofit and for-profit actors dedicated to various aspects of the recovery in the Kesennuma community. Specifically, the teams met with the local tourism bureau, the founder of a nonprofit that empowers local high schools to pursue their dreams, and the manager of a café and event space. Each of these interactions gave the group members, especially those belonging to Team Tachiagare, opportunities to share their innovative ideas and gain a greater understanding of what implementing such a program would entail.

One morning, the official from the Kesennuma Tourism and Convention Bureau presented on the ongoing initiatives within the city designed to attract tourists, and the public and private organizations working to coordinate efforts. Members of Team Tachiagare inquired about the dynamics that exist between these stakeholders and how they organize themselves to develop new programs and conduct marketing activities. After lunch, the representative from the tourism bureau guided the students around the fish market and described the city's desire to turn the fishing industry into a focal point of tourism, similar to Tsukiji Fish Market in Tokyo. Throughout the meeting and tour, American and Japanese participants asked questions and shared opinions about innovative ideas to further develop the tourism industry of Kesennuma.

The following morning, the two teams met with representatives from two non-governmental organizations in Kesennuma, gaining insight into the importance of having connections for coalition building. First, the teams met with the manager of a local café and event space called K-Port. The café was a side project of famous actor Ken Watanabe, who started it to help the people of Kesennuma rebuild their community. In addition to operating as a normal café and restaurant, the café rents its space and equipment to locals for activities such as art exhibitions and parties. Team Tachiagare pitched their *Kabe Night* idea to the manager of K-Port and received feedback on the feasibility and history of holding such events.

The teams then moved on to a meeting with the founder of Sokoage, a nonprofit organization that supports and empowers local high school children to turn their dreams into reality. Through the support of Sokoage, the two high school girls who served as guides for Team Ningyo and Team Tachiagare in Kesennuma were able to design and execute their tour idea. Aside from discussing the various ways his organization helps young people start

innovative projects, the most revealing lesson learned from the session was the importance of gaining trust within a community. The founder of Sokoage explained that without trust, it is nearly impossible to build up enough social capital to accomplish anything, especially in a small town such as Kesennuma. This conversation prompted both teams to reevaluate the overall feasibility of their projects, and to begin thinking about how these obstacles can be overcome.

Giving Back to the Community

Similar to Ongawa, the Kesennuma Tourism & Convention Bureau organizes *kataribe* tours of Kesennuma for outside visitors. These activities are made possible through the generous volunteers who give their time and effort to tell their story and the story of Kesennuma. A large group of high school students arrived from the Tokyo area that day, and Teams Ningyo and Tachiagare joined the several small groups and assisted the guides in their tour of the most devastated areas of Kesennuma. Not only did this experience allow them to improve their understanding of what happened to the town and the progress of its recovery, but they were also able to see it through the eyes of Japanese people who are not from Tohoku and may be a bit removed from the ongoing issues on the ground.

Reflecting on Kesennuma

The unpopularity of the seawall around Kesennuma was obvious from the moment the group arrived in town. In reevaluating their project through the lens of their new experience, the students concluded that initiating their proposed event—which would require many stakeholders from across the community—would be difficult. The two teams realized that it may take time before people are ready to attempt to turn this negative element to a potential source of positivity. In addition to the social obstacles of the project, legal hurdles came into focus, given that the events would mostly likely have to occur on both public and private land. Some students experienced the reality of the challenges associated with actually implementing civil society initiatives as anticlimactic and deflating. However, the nightly reflections allowed participants to realize that this trip was about developing their own knowledge, and the importance of viewing their projects with more realistic clarity as a beneficial experience.

“Actually visiting the site and hearing the voice of locals, I’ve come to understand the complexity of the problems that still exist and that they are not easy to solve. However, we were also able to witness the positivity of the people of Kesennuma and see their success stories.”

– Hiroko Okutani, Team Tachiagare, Kyoto University

Tokyo | August 10-11, 2016

Sharing their Experience with Tokyo

The trip's programming culminated with a special visit to the Reconstruction Agency, the temporary governmental bureau charged with overseeing the reconstruction of Tohoku. There, students shared their experiences in Tohoku and learned from the agency representatives in a casual and open setting. The meeting began with a presentation from each team on the basics of their projects, followed by a description of the various activities and meetings they participated while in Tohoku. They then offered their reflection on their own learning, as well as the relevant obstacles and challenges to their projects that they identified.

Following the initial presentations, representatives from several different bureaus within the Reconstruction Agency offered their unique perspective on the projects and their potential to address their respective issues. Over the following 90 minutes, the Japanese and American participants asked questions regarding the current status of the reconstruction, how decisions were made, and what dynamics exist between the central and local governments. The representatives from the Reconstruction Agency were open and honest about their work and its difficulties, which gave the program participants an invaluable window into the inner workings of the Japanese government and giving even greater context and depth to their understanding. At the conclusion of the meeting, participants and representatives of the Reconstruction Agency exchanged business cards, mingled, and got to know one another more personally before finally leaving the agency.

Celebrating the Program and Making Lifelong Connections

After their meeting with the Reconstruction Agency, the Japanese and American participants had an opportunity to enjoy the sights and sounds of Tokyo with one another. After sightseeing and buying souvenirs for their friends and family back home, the 2016 Building the TOMODACHI Generation program participants gathered with over 20 other alumni from the 2014 through 2016 years of the program for a closing dinner in Tokyo. Thirty two alumni gathered together to celebrate the end of the initial iteration of the program. The event brought alumni back together with their cohorts and gave them the opportunity to make new connections with alumni from other years of the program. Although the strength of these bonds may have been uncertain at the close of the 2014 and 2015 programs, the happiness seen on the faces of those in attendance, reconnecting with old friends and making new ones, and the conversations overheard, revealed the influence the BTG program has had on their lives.

“Augmenting the program in 2016 to ensure that the two winning teams would be able to visit the very towns on which their project was based made all the difference in the world. The connective tissue between the theory of what they did in D.C., coupled with the reality they experienced in Tohoku truly maximized their learning and gave them a whole new perspective of what it actually means to have a functioning civil society.”

– Kyle Bergman, Program Advisor, Building the TOMODACHI Generation

“The summer program in Japan meant more to me than I could possibly describe in one paragraph. I can vividly remember seeing the extraordinarily large amount of repairs and construction still going on in Onagawa and Kesennuma, yet somehow I was also able to witness more happiness and hope expressed by the people of those towns than any people I have ever met. It was that very hope that made me want to return one day to continue to help the Tohoku region repair. I will never forget this incredible experience and most importantly the amazingly kind and sincere people I had the privilege of meeting along the way.”

– Ryan Justice, Team Ningyo, University of New Hampshire

“First of all, I can't even describe how much I feel thankful for this Tohoku program, in which I could spend precious time with the wonderful members of my team and the local people in both Onagawa and Kesennuma. Even though I have visited these cities before, I never got a chance to hear so many voices from the locals. It was

also a great experience that each team had a chance to present our projects to the influential people who will lead Toboku to recovery. Also, I was personally touched that the American students who had never visited Toboku before were so serious about the future of those two cities. I feel sorry for the participants in next year's program who will not be able to have the same opportunity."

– Haruko Sano, Team Ningyo, Sophia University

"Being part of this program was a life-changing experience. The program challenged me in new ways, and expanded the horizons of what I thought I could do to help other people around the world. While experiencing Toboku's path to recovery first-hand, I could acknowledge the strength of a community that together embraced a challenge and will go further ahead to make it a reality. I will forever cherish the opportunity given to me to explore and present opportunities for change and progress, and I will take with me all the beautiful moments shared with my peers, who have now become friends and family."

– Roberto Torres, Team Ningyo, University of Puerto Rico

About the TOMODACHI Initiative

The TOMODACHI Initiative is a public-private partnership, born out of support for Japan's recovery from the Great East Japan Earthquake that invests in the next generation of Japanese and American leaders through educational and cultural exchanges as well as leadership programs. In the aftermath of the Great East Japan Earthquake of March 11, 2011, the United States military and Japan Self-Defense Forces worked together successfully in Operation Tomodachi to provide immediate humanitarian relief to the Tohoku region. Building upon this cooperation and spirit of friendship, the United States and Japan launched the TOMODACHI Initiative. TOMODACHI is led by the United States Government and the U.S.-Japan Council, a tax-exempt non-profit organization, and is supported by the Government of Japan, corporations, organizations and individuals from the United States and Japan. To learn more, visit <http://usjapantomodachi.org/>

About The U.S.-Japan Research Institute (USJI)

Established in 2009, the U.S.-Japan Research Institute(USJI) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization located in Washington, D.C., jointly operated by Doshisha University, Keio University, Kyoto University, Kyushu University, Ritsumeikan University, University of Tokyo, University of Tsukuba, and Waseda University. Our missions are centered on the development of the bilateral relationship between the United States and Japan, and include: conducting policy analysis and academic research; fostering the future generation of decision makers; and building a strong U.S.-Japanese local community. In order to achieve these missions, USJI holds events through the year, including seminars and lectures related to U.S.-Japan relations. USJI also strive to develop the future generation of policymakers in the bilateral relationship between the United States and Japan. To learn more, visit <http://www.us-jpri.org/index.html>

About Common Earth, Co.

Common Earth's mission is to create experiences and channels that bridge people together, closer to nature, to inspire and implement solutions to societal issues. The Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011 has devastated and changed many people's lives. Many people continue to live in an environment seeking light to guide the future. Situations such as this scatter all over the world today, and call for cooperation and action for solutions – for recovery after disasters or development of communities. Common Earth is a response to this call – to rethink and reposition ourselves, in communities, in societies and on this planet. How do we live together? How do we live with nature? How can we better the world we live in? These are core questions that lie within us and construct our fundamental values. Common Earth strives to explore and develop the answers to these questions. Our love of wilderness and unique cultures demands us to take action in building a future where we live in coherence with ourselves and with nature, with no borders to set us apart – for ourselves and for those to come. To learn more, visit: <http://ceco.jp/>

About The Washington Center (TWC)

The Washington Center for Internships and Academic Seminars is an independent, nonprofit organization serving hundreds of colleges and universities in the United States and other countries by providing selected students with challenging opportunities to train and learn in Washington, D.C. The largest program of its kind, The Washington Center has more than 50,000 alumni who agree that their TWC experience helped them develop job skills, discover their passion, make invaluable professional and personal connections, gain access, set a plan for the future, and strengthen their desire to give back to their communities. Many of the alumni are in leadership positions in the public, private, and nonprofit sectors of the U.S. and around the world. To learn more, visit <http://www.twc.edu>



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