

PROJECT TRUST VOLUNTEER 2016/17

22/09/17

Dear Trustees of the Nineveh Charitable Trust

Thank you

Nearly two years ago, The Nineveh Charitable Trust generously donated £300 to the charity Project Trust, towards my educational gap year volunteering abroad. Thank you! Here is how I got on.

An amazing year in Japan with Project Trust

A year ago today, I had been in Japan for just two weeks. I was excited about what the year ahead had in store for me, but worried about how I would cope being so far from home and in a new environment. Thanks to Project Trust, and to everyone who had so kindly contributed to my fundraising, I had arrived in Tokyo as ready as I could be. It was then up to me to make a success of my year.

It is now September 2017, and I have been back in the UK for four weeks. I have attended my debriefing course with Project Trust on the Isle of Coll, and I have been busy getting ready to go to university. I have also had chance to reflect on my life-shaping gap year.

What did I do?

My life as a volunteer in Japan was incredibly busy, but also immensely rewarding.

Primarily, I worked at Junten Junior and Senior High School in Tokyo as an assistant language teacher. While technically a volunteer, I worked a full-time schedule. School ran from 8:10am until 4:30pm every week day; however I occasionally had to work half-days on Saturday as well.

I taught students aged 13-17 as an ALT for 13 lessons a week, where my chief role was to be a native English speaker for the students to listen to and practise with. The main focus of these lessons was conversational English, so my presence as a native speaker was vital to the students' ability to speak English in a natural-sounding way.

In addition to these lessons, I also taught first-year students (12-13) for ten minutes every morning. These lessons varied by term, but mostly involved the development of students' basic English and their pronunciation skills. Other lessons I assisted with were Foreign Affairs with older students, and two classes a week with younger students who had advanced English skills due to living abroad for several years.

Outside of lessons, I was responsible for creating and marking students' homework and tests, and assisting at school promotional events on Saturdays. I was also involved in special school events, such as being a judge for the English Recitation Contest in February, and assisting at the Sports Festival in July.

My second major task was teaching various adult classes, one on each week day. Each class comprised a different group of adults: parents from the Junten PTA, ex-PTA members, employees of the Kita-city ward office, and members of a local English language club.

Some of these classes were divided into beginners and advanced students, in which case I taught one half, while my project partner, Katie, taught the other half. In other cases, Katie and I taught the whole class together. We were completely responsible for the planning and teaching of these classes, and it was an enjoyable challenge to create new and interesting content for each lesson.

For a couple of hours per week, I also assisted at a local nursery school. Not only did the children have an opportunity to speak basic English with me, but I could also practise my Japanese with them!

What about cultural exchange?

Clearly, living and working in Tokyo has taught me a lot about the Japanese way of life, and I will continue to share this knowledge with people in the UK when the opportunities arise.

In fact, some customs and features of Japanese etiquette have become so ingrained in my everyday life, I am finding it hard to drop them now that I am back in England (I am still catching myself bowing to shop attendants and cashiers)!

In Japan, cultural exchange particularly became a large part of the adult classes I taught. These lessons were generally focussed more on discussion and conversation, so talking about aspects of both British and Japanese culture could be incorporated very easily.

I have learned that Japanese people are, in general, very curious about other countries and cultures, and about how foreign people react to Japanese culture. One frequently asked question was 'What is your first impression of Japan?' I was able to direct this question back to my students in regards to the UK. It was fascinating to learn what things Japanese people usually associate with the UK, and I was glad to be able to tell them about life in Britain.

What did I gain from living and working in Japan?

While my schedule at Junten High School was incredibly packed, I was able to find time to explore Tokyo (the most populated city in the world) and also to travel to Hokkaido and Osaka, and places just outside Tokyo. It was an exciting challenge making and carrying out travel plans in a new country, and travelling allowed me to discover the culture that lies beyond the city.

While a year was not time enough for me to become fluent in Japanese, I have learned a considerable amount of the language (speaking and reading), which was essential for day-to-day activities such as visiting the supermarket, and extremely helpful for travelling.

My Japanese skills became competent enough that, at Junten's summer term closing ceremony in August, I was able to give a farewell speech to the entire school completely in Japanese. This was one of my proudest moments of the whole year.

The organisation and time-management skills, as well as the self-belief and the self-confidence I gained from working to a rigorous schedule (eg attending lessons, dealing with marking, preparing for and attending evening classes) will be invaluable at university, and my life beyond.

Through teaching, I enhanced my abilities to work as a team (with my project partner, Katie, and the rest of the teaching staff) and to critically evaluate both students' work and my own progress. Being responsible for keeping a flat and self-catering are also vital life skills I have had the opportunity to develop in a very unique way.

The relationships I established in Japan will stay with me for the rest of my life. I thoroughly enjoyed being immersed in the running of the English department at Junten. While certainly the youngest teachers at the school, me and Katie were treated with respect by both staff and students.

When I began teaching, nearly every student, both at Junten and in the adult classes, seemed just as nervous as I was. However, building up a relationship with them happened a lot faster and easier than I had imagined.

While I know I will be able to go back to visit people in years to come, I only wish I could have stayed at my project for another year to see what else I could have contributed, and to see how my students' English skills will develop further.

I feel greatly honoured and proud to have been a part of the legacy of Project Trust volunteers at Junten High School.

How will this benefit me in the future?

Thanks to my year in Japan, I am now approaching university with more self-assurance. I am confident that I can live independently, and can use my knowledge of time management and organisation to help get the most out of my course.

The Project Trust experience has helped me to realise my potential. It has made me aware of the extent of the opportunities which life provides beyond university, which I am now determined to explore.

While my year in Japan has come to an end, this is only the beginning of my Project Trust journey. Upon joining the long history of alumni, I can continue to support Project Trust, and the charity can continue to support me. I intend to stay in touch with Project Trust, and want to work them to let potential future volunteers know of the opportunities the charity provides.

My Project Trust experience will always be there for me to draw on for the rest of my life. As their message states, with this year I have challenged myself, learned about the world, and been a positive force within it.

Thank you again

Everything I have experienced and learned preparing for, and during, my 12 months in Japan will, I am sure, be a positive influence on me for the rest of my life. I have made many lifelong friends and countless wonderful memories. Thank you to The Nineveh Charitable Trust for helping this to happen. I am very grateful.

Yours sincerely



RGH Lewis
The Nineveh Charitable Trust
Park Farm
Frittenden Road
Biddenden
Ashford
Kent
TN27 8LG

project
TRUST
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