

TOHOKU REVISIT PROGRAM – HEIDI BRESLER

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs in conjunction with the Japan Tourism Agency held a program to support the “homecoming” of experienced former Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) participants who worked for two years or more as Assistant Language Teachers / Coordinators for International Relations to the disaster-stricken areas where they formerly served. The program was offered in local municipalities in the three prefectures of Iwate Prefecture, Miyagi Prefecture, and Fukushima Prefecture that were stricken by the Great East Japan Earthquake. The program ran for about two months starting from August 1 with the cooperation of the three prefectures and the city of Sendai.



I was lucky enough to be selected in the first batch of participants in the program. Only 14 people were selected in total for the first batch including eight people from the United States, three from Australia, two from Canada, and one from the United Kingdom. Each person selected visited their hometown area for about one week.

The main purpose of this program was to deepen each of the participant's understanding of the current conditions in Japan and the disaster areas, as well as the safety of traveling and residing in Japan.

ACTIVITIES

Each participant was able to select their own activities in order to reconnect with their former hometown. I participated in a range of activities including revisiting former workplaces and schools, visits to local groups, sporting activities with local residents and volunteer work in some of the worst affected areas of my hometown, Iwaki City, Fukushima Prefecture.

Through these activities, I was not only able to reconnect with the people of my city, but also gain a greater understanding of the extremely tough situation they have been in over the months since 11th March, 2011.

IMPRESSIONS

Although over half a year has passed since the disaster, I was surprised at how much work lies ahead in the recovery process. The most rewarding experience during my stay was participating in volunteer activities and assisting the local people in need. Talking to them about their personal experiences made me reflect on the sheer magnitude of this disaster.

Before I left Australia, many people including my own family were concerned for my safety. During my time there, I never once felt like I was in danger.



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I felt a sense of achievement from this visit to Japan. I saw what I needed to see and I believe that somehow I made people happy by being there. A week was definitely not long enough and given the opportunity again, I would be back there in a second. I am very grateful to have been chosen to participate in the revisit program and I think that the destiny that is between me and the people of Iwaki will continue on well into the future.

I hope that the recovery process continues and the people can enjoy happiness in their futures despite all the sadness that the disaster has brought to their lives. If you have never visited Japan, I suggest that you make those plans to go and I hope you love all the special things this wonderful country has to offer as much as I do.

Please feel free to read the full blog about my visit on my website:

www.yamato-damashii.net

Further information can also be found on the JET Alumni Association's website as follows:

<http://melbourne.jetalumni.org/?portfolio=hobart-jet-revisits-japan>