

# KIZUNA Project

## Special Feature (1)

**The Kizuna Project** is an initiative of the Japanese Government which aims to provide accurate information to the international community concerning Japan's recovery from the Great East Japan Earthquake of March 2011. By sending groups of students to affected areas, the government hopes they will return home and discuss their experiences with their friends, family and members of the public. In addition, the visits help to contribute to the development of local communities in Japan as well as strengthening the bond between Japan and other nations.

Japan Reports asked several Sydney-based participants to write about their experiences on the program.



First, we hear from **Ms April Morley**. From 9 to 18 December 2012, she was a supervisor of a group of Australian and New Zealand university students who visited Japan on **Australia and New Zealand Kizuna (Bond) Youth Exchange Project with Japan, Asia-Oceania and North America**.

April is a former Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Program participant. She worked as an Assistant Language Teacher from 2006 to 2008 in Miyagi Prefecture. Her international experience helped her in her role as a student exchange advisor at two universities after she returned to Sydney. She is currently a full-time primary teacher having obtained a masters of teaching at the University of Sydney. Always an enthusiastic supporter of the JET program and Japan, she was keen to share her insights and some of her favorite things about Japan with the KIZUNA students, including buying many Japanese sweets to share with them during the trip! Over to April.

### Australian and New Zealand Kizuna Trip 2012

In December 2012, I travelled to Japan with a group of one hundred Australian and New Zealand university students. Over a ten day period we visited sites in Fukushima Prefecture which were affected by the nuclear accident, attended lectures, discussed issues with residents and business leaders, visited university and schools and participated in a homestay program. We were just a small group of this ambitious program - over 41 countries were invited to participate and over 12,000 people took part from all over the world.

### Return to Japan after JET

This was my first trip back to Japan since I was on the JET Program in 2006-2008. I was anxious to return as I had so many wonderful memories of my time living there. I looked forward to little things that I had missed in my daily life in Australia such as *manju* (a type of Japanese sweet), canned coffee and *onigiri* (delicious rice balls). However, I was also nervous. The Japan I knew had changed dramatically since the disaster of 2011.

Upon arriving at the Ikebukuro Life Safety Learning Centre (an educational facility to teach about disaster prevention and preparedness) we watched footage of the destruction of Ishinomaki, Kesenuma and



Experiencing a level 7 earthquake at the Ikebukuro Safety Learning Centre in Tokyo

Minamisanriku, all places I frequently visited during my time living in Japan five years ago. Like the news footage in the international media following the earthquake, the images were confronting and shocking. No longer were there carefully tended fishing nets on the shore, instead there were rivers of debris. I was interested to learn more about the ongoing recovery of these places and hear positive stories of how the residents were rebuilding their lives, information largely absent in the popular media.

### Indirect impacts of the disaster on local economies

Our Kizuna group visited the Aizu region of Fukushima Prefecture, which recorded few casualties after the earthquake. However misconceptions about radiation levels have meant sales of products such as rice, vegetables and saké have declined in both domestic and overseas markets, depressing local economies.

We visited a local Japan Agricultural Co-operative and watched rice being scanned for contamination. Although radiation testing throughout the area has shown there was no increase in the radiation levels following the nuclear accident, consumers remain

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Fukushima rice with a QR code that tells the results of radiation screening

