

Consul-General of Japan in Sydney's Newsletter

No. 39 Growing sister city and school exchanges between Japan and Australia

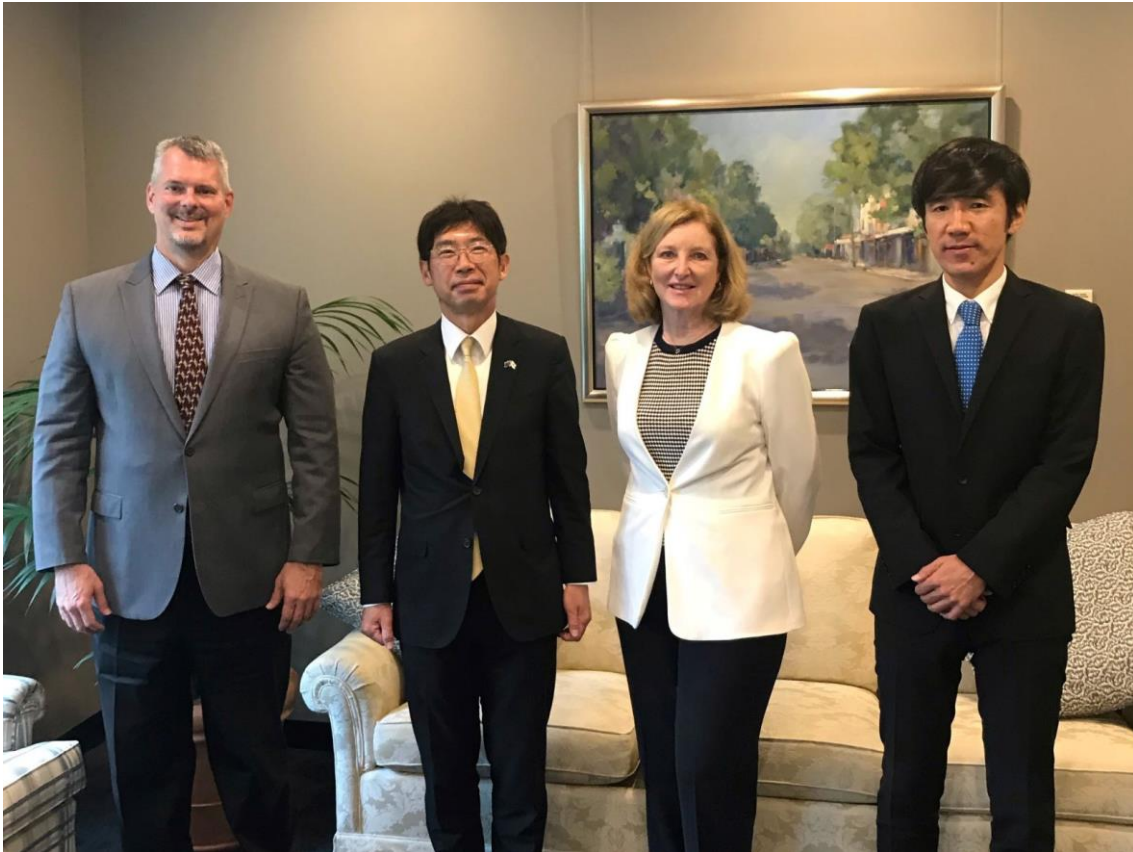
21 May 2021

Where did you go on school trips when you were young? I was living in Yokoyama, and in year 6 of primary school, I went to Nikko with my school, and then in year 3 of high school (year 12), I went to Tohoku. Travelling with friends to completely new places was an intense experience, and to this day, I still have several clear memories from my school trips.

For children, experiencing life overseas must be an even more profound episode in their lives. After arriving in Sydney, I learnt for the first time how many Australian and Japanese children are taking part in mutual exchange visits, doing homestays and experiencing each other's culture and way of life through various study tours and exchange programs.

Today one of my most important tasks is to promote this type of exchange among the next generation and further develop mutual understanding and cooperation. Recently, the circumstances around COVID-19 in Sydney have improved, and so I have been fortunate to have the opportunity to visit a number of cities which are engaging in sister city exchange with Japan.

In this issue of my newsletter, as I report on these visits, I invite you to consider with me the current state and the future of sister city and sister school exchange between Japan and Australia.



**With Mayor Gail Giles-Gidney and Deputy Mayor Craig Campbell of Willoughby City Council and Mr AKAIWA Hirotomo of Japan Local Government Centre (CLAIR Sydney)
(9 April 2021)**

• Willoughby City Council and Sugunami City (Tokyo)

On 9 April, I visited Willoughby City (population approx. 70,000) in Sydney's north and had discussions with Mayor Gail Giles-Gidney and Deputy Mayor Craig Campbell. Willoughby City has several areas where many Japanese people reside, including Chatswood, St Leonards, Artarmon and Northbridge.

Willoughby City has been promoting exchange with Sugunami City (Tokyo Metropolis) since 1990. Sugunami City has been sending groups of 25 junior high school students to Willoughby City every August for two weeks as part of its junior high school overseas exchange program; students visit local schools and do homestays and visit the Consulate and businesses. Before COVID-19, Mayor Giles-Gidney also received courtesy calls every year.

Every year, as part of Willoughby City Council's annual Emerge festival, the Japan Club of Sydney (JCS) organizes Matsuri Japan Festival. This year, it is planned to be held in October. I am looking forward to the festival.



In front of “Koshigaya-tei” teahouse at the Japanese garden with Mayor George Brticevic [second left] and CEO Lindy Deitz [second right] of Campbelltown City Council among others (15 April 2021)

● Campbelltown City Council and Koshigaya City (Saitama Prefecture)

On 15 April, I visited Campbelltown City (population approx. 150,000) in Sydney's south west and had discussions with Mayor George Brticevic and CEO Lindy Deitz. Campbelltown and Koshigaya City (population approx. 340,000) in Saitama Prefecture became sister cities in 1984 and have been engaged in active exchange such as youth missions and the mutual exchange of city employees. Staff member, Amanda, who took part in the meeting, had been on a study trip in Koshigaya for several months the year before last.

In Campbelltown, you will find Koshigaya Park and a Japanese garden, where you can enjoy a Japanese atmosphere. In Koshigaya, there is the Campbelltown Forest of Wild Birds and Campbelltown Park. On 3 July, a sister city event with Koshigaya City will be held at the “Chill Fest” winter festival in Campbelltown and visits are planned to resume.



With City of Canterbury-Bankstown Mayor Khal Asfour and others at the construction site of the planned Western Sydney University Campus (26 April 2021)

● **City of Canterbury-Bankstown and Suita City (Osaka)**

On 26 April, I visited the City of Canterbury-Bankstown (population approx. 370,000) and exchanged views with city officials including Mayor Khal Asfour and the deputy vice-chancellor of Western Sydney University. Since 1989, Canterbury-Bankstown has been engaging in exchange with its sister city, Suita City (population approx. 370,000) in Osaka Prefecture.

In 2020, on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of their sister city agreement and the 80th anniversary of Suita becoming a city, a delegation from Suita City had planned to visit Canterbury-Bankstown. Their itinerary was densely scheduled with lectures about multiculturalism and site visits and seminars on topics such as medical services, cooperation with universities, start-up support, environmental guidelines and ageing population policy among others. It was a real disappointment that it had to be cancelled due to COVID-19.

In recent years, Canterbury-Bankstown's population has dramatically increased, and in front of the council offices, a new Western Sydney University campus is being constructed. During my visit, I could feel the momentum of the city's development.



With Sutherland Shire Council Mayor Steve Simpson and others at the Chuo City Garden
(26 April 2021)

● **Sutherland Shire Council and Chuo City (Tokyo)**

On the afternoon of the same day, I visited Sutherland Shire Council (population approx. 230,000) and exchanged views with Mayor Steve Simpson. Sutherland has been engaging in exchange with its sister city, Chuo City (population approx. 140,000), since 1991, and this year marks their 30th anniversary of exchange. Centering on reciprocal homestay exchange for junior high school students, exchange activities introducing each city to the other are held every year.

Next to the Sutherland Shire Council office, there is the splendid Chou City Garden, which was donated by Chuo City in 1993, and to this day, the garden is beautifully maintained by a local gardener. I became aware that Tokyo's Chuo City, which includes historical centres such as Ginza, Nihonbashi and Tsukiji, is also investing in this type of cultural exchange.

Furthermore, high schools in Sutherland are also receiving junior high school students from Hitachiomiya City who are doing overseas training. In 2019, more than 60 junior high school students took part in student exchange or a homestay. I am sure it was a valuable experience for them all.



Mr Bob Griffiths, Chairman of Cowra Garden Board, and Honorary Associate Professor Peter Armstrong, University of Sydney, at the opening ceremony of the Koyo Matsuri of the Cowra Japanese Garden and Cultural Centre (4 May 2021)

● Cowra Japanese Garden’s Koyo Matsuri (Autumn Festival)

On 4 May, the the Cowra Japanese Garden and Cultural Centre’s inaugural Koyo Matsuri (Autumn Festival) began. That day, I was also in Cowra (population approx. 13,000), and as well as laying wreaths at the Japanese and Australian War Cemeteries, I attended the festival’s opening ceremony.

As I have previously introduced in an earlier newsletter, in Cowra the 1944 breakout by Japanese prisoners of war after the end of WWII led to the establishment of the Japanese War Cemetery and the creation of the Japanese garden and the town followed a path of exchange for reconciliation between Japan and Australia.

At the Cowra Japanese Garden, the large-scale Sakura Matsuri (Cherry Blossom Festival) is held every year in September. Last year, the Sakura Matsuri had to be cancelled due to COVID-19, however, this fact became an opportunity to reconsider the events held at the garden. From this year, to coincide with Japan's Children's Day held annually on 5 May, a new Koyo Matsuri (Autumn Festival) was established with a focus on engaging and educating children. It is wonderful to see Japan-Australia exchange developing even further in Cowra – a place which has such deep connections with Japan.



Receiving a photo album of the city from Orange City Council Mayor Reg Kidd
(5 May 2021)

- **Orange City Council and Ushiku City (Ibaraki Prefecture)**

The following day on 5 May, I was kindly shown around Orange City (population approx. 40,000) by Mayor Reg Kidd with whom I also shared information. For more than 30 years since 1990, Orange City Council has engaged in sister city exchange with Ushiku City (population approx. 80,000) in Ibaraki Prefecture.

Of particular note, in Orange and Ushiku, two high schools have become sister schools and every year there is a reciprocal exchange of students. Cr Kidd's wife is a high school teacher at the sister school in Orange, and she has not only visited Japan seven times already, but together with the Mayor, she has also hosted students on home stays.

Agriculture thrives in Orange. Since 1992, it has been home to the headquarters of the NSW Department of Primary Industries when it moved to Orange from Sydney. In 2018, Japan's Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries signed a Memorandum of Cooperation (MOC) with the NSW Department of Primary Industries (DPI). I took the opportunity to meet with DPI Director General Scott Hansen and to inspect the agricultural innovations centre known as GATE (Global AgTech Ecosystem).



Exchanging views with Blue Mountains City Council Deputy Mayor Chris Van der Kley and others at the Blue Mountains Cultural Centre
(12 May 2021)

● **Blue Mountains City Council and Sanda City (Hyogo Prefecture)**

On 12 May, I visited Blue Mountains City Council (population approx. 80,000) located to the west of Sydney. I met and exchanged views with Deputy Mayor Chris Van der Kley and members of Sister Cities Committee, including its chair Mr Allan Graham. Since 1988, Blue Mountains City Council has been engaging in exchange with Sanda City (population approx. 110,000) in Hyogo Prefecture. Specifically, the two cities have “citizen runner” exchange, a children’s art exchange program and high school exchange.

While it was cancelled last year due to COVID-19, the children's art exchange program is scheduled to resume this year, and a video conference was held the week after my visit to prepare for it. In addition, there is a Sanda Japanese Friendship Garden in Blue Mountains City. In anniversary years, reciprocal visits are conducted and trees are planted together with commemorative plaques in the garden which is being carefully maintained by the Sister City Committee.



Mr Peter Gibson emceeing the webinar about Tomodachi 2021 online school exchange
(22 February 2021)

● **Tomodachi 2021 – online exchange between Japanese and Australian schools**

School exchanges are not limited to sister city exchanges. An online school exchange program, “Australian Olympic Connect | Tomodachi 2021”, organised by the Australian Olympic Committee is just beginning. Running from April to July, the program will connect Japanese and Australian schools via online exchange and it has the support of Japan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry for Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT).

Applications for Japanese and Australian schools interested in participating were open from February to April and the target of 200 Japanese and 200 Australian schools was exceeded, with 300 classes in Japan and 300 in Australia registering for the program. Matching the classes has finished, and from now, exchange will start in earnest.

With travel between Japan and Australia difficult due to COVID-19, it is hoped that the online exchange between the 300 Japanese and 300 Australian classes participating in Tomodachi 21 will lead to reciprocal visits in the future, further developing school exchange between us.



Sutherland Shire Council and Chuo City student exchange
(Source: Sutherland Shire Council and Chuo City sister city exchange website)

● **Towards the further promotion of sister city and sister school exchange**

Japan-Australia relations are not limited to trade and investment or security relations. For decades, the development and accumulation of sister city and sister school exchange has been strengthening mutual understanding and cooperation between our two countries. Travelling around the various cities and witnessing the support shown by schools applying for Tomodachi 2021, I have felt the breadth and depth of this exchange.

Looking to the future, I would like to meet as many people as possible who are responsible for these sister city and school-to-school exchanges and support their activities in order to deepen and broaden this type of exchange even further. I urge you all to encourage the next generation to engage in exchange between Japan and Australia.

Sister cities between Japan and NSW/NT (Consulate-General's website)

https://www.sydney.au.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_en/sister_city.html

Australian Olympic Connect | Tomodachi 2021

<https://www.olympics.com.au/community-and-schools/australian-olympic-connect-2020/>

(End)