

JETAA playing an important role in the JET Program and beyond



JETAA NSW, formerly JETAA Sydney, is the **J**apan **E**xchange and **T**eaching (JET) Program **A**lumni **A**ssociation for New South Wales. The Association is a great way for former JETs to maintain a link with the program and to support Australia-Japan relations.

JETAA NSW arranges various social and cultural functions throughout the year and also invests much effort into promoting the JET program itself. Members of JETAA NSW attend information sessions held by the Consulate so that prospective JETs can hear firsthand personal experiences from former participants. JETAA members help with the interview process and they also hold an important pre-departure orientation for successful NSW candidates.

At the February AGM, **Mr Ben Trumbull** was re-elected to serve a second term as president. *Japan Reports* asked him a few questions about his time on the program and about JETAA NSW.



Mr Ben Trumbull

Japan Reports: *You worked as a Coordinator of International Relations at Akaoka Town and then Konan City from July 2005 to July 2006. What were your major tasks as a CIR?*

Ben Trumbull: As a CIR, I was lucky to be involved in a range of projects and activities, which included assisting with running of town festivals; translating materials and interpreting for foreign tourists at the town's (folding-kabuki print) Ekin-Gura gallery; writing one-page articles in Japanese for the town newsletter; teaching community English classes; making kindergarten and school visits; giving talks; organising community international exchange events. One of my most interesting jobs was performing twice in the Kochi JET "Tosaben Musical" - a travelling musical in the local dialect!

JR: *What do you feel you gained from your time on the JET Program?*

BT: So much! I felt the program really broadened my horizons. Aside from having an incredible time, developing work and life skills, improving my Japanese, meeting people from all over the world, and making some great friends - I found I learned a lot about myself. Being in such a different environment made me stop and think more about who I am and what makes me Australian. Being able to give back and connect with the local community on a grass roots level was extremely rewarding. My time of the program really cemented my connections with Japan and also helped prepare me for my jobs post-JET, firstly at CLAIR and now The Japan Foundation, where my Japanese language skills and understanding of Japanese working culture helped immensely.

JR: *You speak excellent Japanese, and to be able to take on the role of a CIR, you had to have a very high level of proficiency, including reading and writing skills. How did you learn Japanese and what first inspired you to acquire Japanese over other languages?*

BT: I've always enjoyed learning languages, and first started learning Japanese alongside French as a primary school student in Year 5 - and was in a unique position of having several Japanese families as neighbours. I was really excited to learn that phrases we had studied in class such as "O-genki desu ka?" were not just words on a page we memorised, but

were a form of communication understood and reciprocated by real Japanese people. Faced with decisions in middle and senior high schools, I found the challenge of learning Japanese over European languages quite exciting, and viewed Japanese as more useful particularly as Australia's ties with Asia were growing so rapidly, so I continued through to HSC and university level.

In terms of how I learned Japanese, aside from learning what was in the textbook, I tried to immerse myself in the language as much as possible. As a high school student I went to Nara Prefecture for a two month home stay and picked up vocabulary heard regularly, and gradually built up my own. I also developed a bit of a love for Japanese music and karaoke - a really fun way of learning Japanese, and I enjoy a good karaoke session every now and then. Learning *kanji* (Japanese characters) at university was a lot of work, but I found the effort rewarding.

JR: *Moving on to JETAA NSW, last year the Association changed its name from JETAA Sydney to JETAA NSW. What was behind that decision?*

BT: This is actually something that was brought up at the JETAA Oceania Conference in 2012. While we are Sydney based, we have some JET Alumni in Newcastle, Wollongong and around NSW, and wanted to reflect this in our name, to reach out and encourage more members from around the state to get involved.

JR: *Do you and the committee have any major projects or aims for JETAA NSW in 2014?*

BT: In line with the name change to JETAA NSW, we have plans for some great events outside Sydney to encourage involvement from alumni from around the state. We also have a strong web and social media team this year, and look forward to expanding and improving our online profile and being even more accessible.

JR: *Anything else you'd like to share with readers?*

BT: I'd really like to encourage any JET alumni reading this to sign up as a JETAA NSW member and come along to our events! We'd love to see you!

www.jetaansw.org

There are two main positions on the JET Program. Most participants are engaged as ALTs (Assistant Language Teachers) and work together with a Japanese Teacher of English in government schools. They also introduce their own culture to the school and wider communities. There are fewer CIRs (Coordinators of International Relations) on the program—their role is to assist local authorities maintain and develop international relations. Around 3,760 young Australians have been on the JET Program.