

Reference Data:

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Building for the future: Habitat for Humanity Global Village trips**Mary Hughes****Shizuoka University of Art & Culture****Amy Jenkins****Keiwa College, Niigata**

What does building houses have to do with English communication? Helping people in need to build a house of their very own was the way we provided our students with a unique overseas experience using English. In the spring of 2005, we served as team leaders on two separate Global Village (GV) trips to the Philippines and Fiji sponsored by the NGO, Habitat for Humanity International (HFHI). This paper provides a brief explanation of the process involved in setting up a GV trip and the benefits of this kind of trip for students in Japan from our perspectives as team leaders.

Introduction

In the past, Japan has primarily focused on volunteering within Japan. For example, many schools have volunteer days in which students clean up beaches or spend time at day care centers. Recently, concerned university and high school teachers across Japan have started to offer their students a more global approach to volunteering. The HFHI GV trip project is one that introduces international, hands-on volunteering to Japanese youth. Students do not just pay to go on a trip--they have to work for months in advance at fundraising before they leave and then help to build a house while they are there. Throughout the process, students become more aware of global issues, especially problems associated with housing and economic disparity. They grow from interacting with nationals of the host country by living and working together and come back to Japan as changed individuals, as is evident in the following student comments:

My point of view has changed a lot after I saw the life and the culture of the Philippines with my own eyes.

I now can understand what is our own culture by having experienced another culture. I could reflect on myself because of this.

Goals of a Global Village Trip

As we were both new to leading GV trips, we thought about our purpose in wanting to expose students to an overseas volunteer work trip and came up with three main goals: improving English, building links between the university and the local community, and creating an opportunity for student growth.

Firstly, we wanted to provide the opportunity for students to improve their English communication skills. As the language used in all participating GV countries is English, the trip would give the students plenty of chances to practice English with local people. The fact that this practice may not be with a native speaker was irrelevant as exposure to World Englishes is valuable in itself. Because there were students with various levels of English, and some quite low, participating in the trip, it was expected that a language barrier would allow students to gain the rich experience in communicating without language. Secondly, we hoped that our projects would create links between our universities and their local communities. This would be done through the intertwining activities of awareness raising and fundraising. The third goal of leading students on

the GV trip was so that they would grow as global citizens from the experience. We believed that the eye-opening experience would allow them to think about real issues in the world today, and we hoped that they would continue to be active in charity work.

Habitat for Humanity International

Habitat for Humanity International is a non-governmental housing organization that is trying to build simple, decent, affordable houses for those who lack adequate shelter. Although HFHI's foundations are Christian, any person from any race or religion can join HFHI and help build or apply for a Habitat house. HFHI does not give away houses, instead they build them in partnership with the homeowners. Prospective homeowners have to pay back an affordable, non-interest loan for the house, and contribute time to the building of other peoples' homes. The GV program allows all kinds of people to help build houses with people from another culture. Not only do GV participants help to build houses, but they also help to raise awareness of the lack of adequate housing in certain parts of the world. To participate in a trip, youth groups (including chaperones) are required to donate 35,000 yen per person. This money is sent to the host country to fund skilled labor, buy building materials, and help with administration costs.

The Process

The following description should give readers an idea of what is involved in organizing a GV trip. First, by contacting the Habitat for Humanity office in Japan, a manual and video can be obtained which details the process and the philosophy behind the trips. The team leader needs to ensure the program matches her objectives before advertising the project to her students. To raise awareness and promote the project, both writers showed the promotional video to their students. However another possibility is to organize a lesson around the video, thus raising interest in the project. Once a number of students are interested (preferably six or more), the team leader should contact the Japan office to request information about prospective GV host countries. At this point it is important to look into the price of flights, as cost will obviously be an important factor in the organization of the trip. It is also necessary at this time to provide approximate numbers and dates of the proposed trip to the Japan office.

While this is in process, fundraising activities need to be started and continued throughout the year (this is discussed in detail below). During the year, contact is maintained with both the Japanese office and the host country. Decisions need to be made about the desired budget. Most host countries offer three costing options: budget, medium, and high. Whichever you plan to use, it will cover your food (and in some cases bottled water), accommodation, and transportation. In addition, for the last two days HFHI suggests that GV groups have some *relaxation and reflection* time. This usually takes place in a comfortable resort location, and allows participants to reflect on their time spent building and interacting with the local people. Habitat for Humanity requires all participants to take out HFHI's special medical insurance. However, it is up to the group to organize injections themselves. Information regarding safety in the host country and on the worksite will be sent to the team leader, and this should be distributed and understood by all members.

Numerous pages of cultural information are sent from the host country to the team leader for distribution to the group. All this information is in English. Although it is good practice for the students to read and comprehend this information, it is worth considering getting smaller groups of students to research into the various aspects of the host country—such as the history, language, geography, and food—and then report back to the whole group.

Fundraising

Ideally, fundraising should be continuing throughout the year. If you are just starting out though, you should start at least six months before you set off on your GV trip. It may be difficult at first to come up with ideas, but once the students have a plan and get organized into teams the activities

can be quite successful. The fundraising activities have created a sense of community between our universities and the local population. The students have gained confidence in their communication skills by being able to effectively explain our projects on numerous occasions to the public. The following is a list, with brief explanations, of fundraising projects that we used.

Flea markets

Selling donated items at local flea markets proved a great way to raise both a lot of money and awareness of our projects. Students asked professors, teachers, friends, and family members for donations. They found that people were more willing to help by donating used goods than by giving cash. However, it may be necessary to remind donors that you are aiming to sell the goods, so they should be in reasonable condition. Ask students to find out when there are flea markets in your area and be sure to sign up by the deadlines. Ensure you have enough storage for the goods throughout the flea market season.

Cookie selling

Teachers made cookies and muffins twice a month and sold them for a suggested donation during lunchtime. Students appeared to enjoy buying *real* American or British cookies and muffins.

Sponsored Halloween parade

Setsuko Toyama, who teaches at Keiwa College, started this idea. About two weeks before Halloween, she asked all her students to ask friends to sponsor them for a minimum of 500 yen in order to enter a costumed parade. On a school day closest to Halloween, her students, together with the HFHI circle students, all dressed up in costumes and walked around the school during lunch hour giving out candy to students and collecting donations.

Thematic charity parties

We have held charity parties with Halloween, Christmas, and tropical themes. The parties have been held both on campus, coinciding with school events, and also at local bars. We used our contacts in town and made agreements with bar owners that we knew. Depending on the kind of support you can obtain from the bar owners, you may be able to make a large part of the required donation on this one night. Students planned games such as bingo and trivia about the host countries. Prizes for the games were recycled items on hand from flea market donations all wrapped up in fancy 100-yen shop wrapping paper. We found that other circles on campus wanted to help, so they sang or gave dance performances at some of the parties. Parties are also a good time to conduct raffles to bring in some extra money.

Brick by brick.

This is a little house made from a cardboard box that has bricks made out of colored construction paper. The goal of this activity is to build the house by selling each brick. The buyer donates any amount to write a message to the future homeowner on the brick and then pastes the brick to the house. Once the houses are built, we took messages off the house and put them in an album of messages for the new homeowners.

Donation boxes

You can buy sturdy wooden or tin cylinder-shaped piggy banks at the 100-yen shop and decorate them or even make your own house-shaped donation boxes as well. Have students go around in the community and ask local shop and restaurant owners for permission to place a donation box in their shops. Make sure it is accompanied with an information leaflet describing your activity. Upon return from the GV trip, it is imperative to thank all the shops that supported the project so that their help will continue.

Street Collections

Depending on where you live, you will need to ask permission from the police and possibly the mayor as well. There will be paperwork and a small fee. It is a good idea to bring information leaflets to give out to passersby and have pictures ready to describe the activity. This is very humbling work as you may not raise a huge amount of money if it is cold or raining. However, it is a very good team building exercise. It is a smart idea to time your street collections around bonus times in June and December.

School festival

We conducted flea markets, sold Filipino food, and had information rooms about our activities at our annual school festivals. You may need to plan well in advance as some college festivals have early deadlines and strict rules about permissible activities. We also called a journalist who ran our story the morning of our school festival. As a result, we had many members of the community stopping by our room to learn more about us and to give donations as well.

Through the fundraising projects, we have both noticed considerable growth in our students. Inevitably, during fundraising the students come into contact with local people. The fundraising and awareness raising activities of our projects have given them the lifelong skills of being able to effectively communicate to the public both informally and during presentations.

In-country

While in the host country, your group's main priority is building houses. However, you may also want, and are encouraged, to do some cultural exchange activities. Both of our groups did a variety of cultural activities in a range of settings. The settings included the host village as well as orphanages, elementary and junior high schools, and universities. Prior to departure, students created ways to introduce elements of Japanese culture to people in the host countries. These activities included demonstrating a tea ceremony, origami, calligraphy, Japanese dance, and a Japanese flute (*shakuhachi*) performance. This opportunity gives students a chance to learn the necessary skills needed to do informal presentations. In addition, students learn the importance of knowing how to explain their own culture to others.

Conclusion

We felt that the three main goals of the project had been achieved for both groups of students. Through a GV project, not only are students able to practice communicating in English, but they are also given the opportunity to mature as individuals and develop a deeper understanding of the lack of adequate housing in the world. Moreover, the growth does not end with the trip. Students from both universities have since taken the project into their own hands, and are now organizing and planning fundraising activities and elements of the trip with enthusiasm. We believe that this project can also be of great benefit to your students.

What I did helped some people, but at the same time it helped me to become more mature in my thinking. We came into contact with each other's minds because we built a house together, danced together, and ate together. I got to understand the Philippines better.

People with completely different backgrounds and cultures worked together. We tried to understand each other in spite of language barriers.

For more information about Habitat for Humanity and its principles refer to <www.habitat.org>.

Reference

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