OVERVIEW: FALL 2021 THROUGH SUMMER 2022

Denver is the state capital of Colorado and one of the largest regional cities where 19,000 Japanese Americans live. My host site, Japan America Society of Colorado (JASC) has been fostering Colorado-Japan relations for over 33 years. My mission was to expand the outreach area and connections for JASC, especially outside of the Denver Metro area, and create new programs that would make a big impact on a wide range of generations. I would like to report here what I did for this mission specifically and mention my goal of the second year.

TOTAL ACTIVITY COUNT

125

TOTAL PEOPLE REACHED

3,825
School and Community Visits

During my first year, I visited 68 classes and 15 local community organizations including libraries, immigrant centers and businesses, and reached 3,212 people. Participants learned about general Japanese culture like language, seasonal events, and business manners through my presentations. Among these activities, calligraphy and yukata workshops were the most popular.

Not only traditional culture, but also pop culture was a core topic of my presentation for participants over 6th grade. I introduced new trends in art, food, fashion, music, and influencers so they can enjoy talking with Japanese people of the same age group if they ever have the opportunity to make Japanese friends.

Poverty and family challenges are serious issues in the U.S. So for me, the most important purpose of my visit was to show another world so these young people can have hopes and dreams for their future. During my presentation, I introduced famous Japanese people who made their dreams come true by their big efforts. Students wrote their dreams on ema (絵馬) and shared them with others. I saw over 500 dreams on ema and would like to reflect them during my second-year of programming.
Bringing Japanese culture outside of Denver Metro area was the cherished desire of my host site and it was especially significant to visit Greeley and Fort Collins, each approximately 55 miles from Denver.

At a school in Greeley, I did a free onigiri event. Over half of the students at that school receive free or reduced-price school meal due to poverty. Most students hadn't seen or eaten onigiri before in their lives. With the donation of rice and supplies from a Japanese restaurant and onigiri manufacturing company in Denver, we were able to serve onigiri to 150 students.

In Fort Collins, I had the chance to join Cultural week at a middle school and gave many kinds of presentation and activities throughout my 4 day stay. For example, students made Japanese cuisine like sushi rolls and tempura and played goldfish fishing wearing yukata after learning about summer festivals.

While in Fort Collins, I also visited Colorado State University for two days and presented pop culture as well as a calligraphy workshop.

In the second year, I’m planning to visit Steamboat Springs which is more than 100 miles away from Denver. I will continue to try to expand our outreach areas and communities served.
I have been passionate about dancing since I was a high school student. At the Denver Takayama Sister City (DTS) annual bunka-no-hi event, I presented J-pop music and performed a dance with some K-12 students of the Denver Japanese School.
I choreographed using famous J-pop music, Minna ga Minna Eiyu by AI. The melody of that song is based on an old American folk tune, "Turkey in the Straw". Almost all of students hadn’t danced before, but we practiced very hard in person and on zoom together for a month and they put on the best performance!

One of students dreamt of being an English teacher in Japan to promote U.S.-Japan relations and this event was her first time to serve as a bridge between U.S. and Japan. One of the students was very shy at first because she moved here from Japan a few months ago, but she came to really enjoy expressing herself with dance and ended up talking a lot with big smiles.
I was really impressed by their efforts and got energized from them.

There was one additional amazing experience from this program. AI-san’s aunt watched our performance online from a local Colorado connection and she shared the video with AI-san. I was shocked by this miracle beyond my imagination. This was made possible by the great efforts of these students.

My role as JOI coordinator is to share Japanese culture with people in Colorado. I would not be able to share my culture without support from DTS, JASC and the locals around me.

Cultural exchange is not one way.
Thank you so much for always being there.
My goals for the second year
My first-year focused on responding to a lot of requests from schools and communities, and passed very quickly. I hope I was able to inspire some of them even a little and will continue to visit schools/communities as much as possible. I will also work on sustainable projects in the second year that can remain here after I go back to Japan. As a result, recently JASC revitalized their Young Professionals Group and I'm leading this effort. I will try to offer workshops and networking meetings so that younger generations can connect with others, enhance Colorado-Japan relations, and develop their own skills.

Comments from my supervisor
It is hard to believe that one year has already passed since Yoko arrived in Denver, while at the same time it feels like she is a long-time partner and collaborator of Japan America Society of Colorado. Yoko fit right in with our little office and took off running. It was amazing to watch the flurry of emails come into our office before the end of the school year in April and May with requests for Yoko to visit local classrooms. Yoko also took over our Kaiwa Club and makes everyone there feel welcome and excited to practice speaking Japanese. In the office we value her input and contributions to all of our activities, even if they are not directly related to her own projects. She is truly a team-player and we can no longer imagine JASC without Yoko! I envision her second year expanding into more leadership opportunities for her with the Young Professionals Group and working more closely with our Board of Directors for their support in her efforts with those young people - the future leaders of our Colorado-Japan relationship. School visits and trips outside of Denver will of course remain a priority as she has created an invaluable program for these teachers and students and she is very good at what she does. We are so excited for our second year with the JOI program. Thank you for this wonderful opportunity.