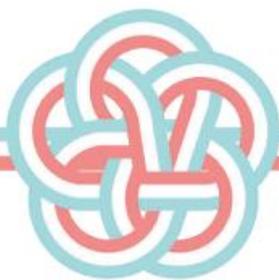


MY KAKEHASHI STORY



**Celebrating
the 10th Anniversary of
KAKEHASHI Project**



はじめに

カケハシ・プロジェクトは、日本政府(外務省)が推進する対日理解促進交流プログラムの一環として、日本と北米地域の将来を担う優秀な青年を招へい・派遣し、相互理解を深めることを目的として、2015年にスタートしました。

これまで約7,000名の北米の青年を日本に招へいするとともに、日本からも約3,000名の青年を北米地域に派遣し、それぞれのグループの関心事項に沿った多彩なプログラムをアレンジしてきました。プログラムには、政府要人への表敬訪問や様々な施設や機関への視察訪問の他、学生との交流・意見交換、地方における視察やホームステイなどが盛り込まれ、日本の政治、外交政策、経済、社会、文化、歴史など幅広い分野における理解の促進を目指すとともに、日米及び日カナダ両国間の友好・信頼関係を深めてきました。

二国間関係を長期的に一層強固かつ発展させるためには、両国間の人と人との間の友情や信頼関係の強化が不可欠です。カケハシ・プロジェクトの10年の積み重ねは、未来の日米及び日カナダ関係を支えるかけがえのない財産となっています。本プログラムの参加者が、本事業で得た経験を活かして、引き続き、日本と北米との「架け橋(カケハシ)」として活躍することを期待するとともに、今後とも、本事業を通じて、日本と北米の「架け橋」の新たな担い手が育成されることを願っています。

結びに、これまで本事業の実施にご尽力いただいた関係者の皆様に深甚なる感謝を申し上げるとともに、本記念誌が、これまでの軌跡を振り返るとともに、未来へ向けた新たな一歩を力強く示す一冊となることを祈念いたします。

外務省北米局北米交流室長
加茂野 亮介

KAMONO Ryosuke
Director, North America Exchange Division,
North American Affairs Bureau,
Ministry of Foreign Affairs





Frank Jannuzi

President and CEO,
Maureen and Mike Mansfield Foundation

Training the Gardeners

Ambassador Mike Mansfield famously described the U.S.-Japan Alliance as “the most important bilateral relationship in the world, bar none.” Ambassador Ryozo Kato was fond of quoting the words of George Schultz that alliance management is like gardening, requiring individuals with discipline and long-term strategic vision who are willing to work hard and get their hands dirty. These two distinguished ambassadors understood that the special U.S.-Japan relationship is not really between nations. It is cemented by people-to-people bonds of friendship, trust, and goodwill. This truth underscores the importance of the KAKEHASHI Project as it celebrates its 10th anniversary.

The KAKEHASHI Project provides constant nourishment of the connections that enable the United States and Japan to tackle common challenges. It promotes mutual understanding, which in turn unlocks opportunities for cooperation. It replenishes the ranks of those who understand the value of U.S.-Japan collaboration in a complex and ever-changing world.

The Mansfield Foundation is proud to be partner in the KAKEHASHI Project. We draw on the “big sky” spirit of Montana to fulfill our role; helping to identify communities in the United States who might not have a chance to get to know Japan without the KAKEHASHI Project.

Two examples stand out. In 2018, the University of Montana dispatched 23 students to Japan for eight days in what proved to be a life-changing experience. Skyler Anderson came from a small rural community in Montana. She found in Japan inspiration to study global business and law. She was especially impressed by the warm welcome from her host family in Miyagi Prefecture’s Kami District. Skyler recounted her experience:

“Amazing! First things first, my Japanese mom put me to work making origami for the first hour of the day. Many of the homestay parents arranged a day for us comprised of a traditional Japanese tea ceremony, cooking Takoyaki balls, traditional Japanese dancing, and a little singing to round out the afternoon. Back we went to the public bath then went to both ramen and sushi for dinner - to get the full Japanese experience.”

In December 2019, a group of Talladega College students got their chance to broaden their horizons. Coming from a small HBCU in rural Alabama, the students of Talladega made the most of their chance to experience life in Japan. They also learned about how their own futures might include opportunities to work for one of the 170 Japanese-owned or -affiliated firms operating in the state of Alabama.

Building friendships. Opening imaginations. Opening doors. Congratulations to the KAKEHASHI Project on its 10th anniversary.





Christine Nakamura

Vice-President,
Central Canada Office,
Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada

The 10th anniversary of the KAKEHASHI Project, provides an opportunity to reflect on a decade of meaningful people-to-people exchange that has strengthened the ties between Japan and North America, and to consider how far the program has come—and how much promise still lies ahead.

In 2013, the Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada (APF Canada) was honoured to coordinate a reciprocal exchange of 400 youths from Japan and Canada on behalf of Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This inaugural initiative was organized in appreciation for Canada's support following the devastating "3-11" earthquake and tsunami of 2011. It offered young people from both countries the chance to understand, experience, and build personal relationships with each other's cultures and communities.

Since 2015, when the program evolved into an annual exchange under Japan's Friendship Ties Programs, APF Canada has been privileged to support its growth and watch it mature into a deeply impactful initiative, which celebrates the power of direct human connection to foster empathy and mutual respect.

One of the most rewarding aspects of our work is hearing from Canadian alumni, years after their KAKEHASHI travels, tell us about the memories they still carry, the friendships with peers in Japan they continue to nurture, and how KAKEHASHI remains one of the most meaningful experiences of their lives. These lasting bonds—formed through shared discovery, conversation, and cultural immersion—are the program's true legacy.

Looking ahead, the importance of people-to-people exchange is only increasing. As our societies navigate rapid technological change, shifting global dynamics, and shared challenges—from climate resilience to inclusive innovation—the ability to collaborate across cultures will be essential. The KAKEHASHI Project is uniquely positioned to nurture the next generation of leaders who can bridge these divides with curiosity, humility, and creativity.

The future of Japan–North America exchange will be shaped by both tradition and innovation. In-person experiences will remain at the heart of the program, while digital tools will help sustain connections long after participants return home. New thematic areas—sustainability, digital transformation, entrepreneurship, and community resilience—will offer fresh avenues for collaboration.

The past decade has shown what is possible when we invest in human connection. The next decade holds even greater potential.

We celebrate the first decade of the KAKEHASHI Project and look forward to many more years of building bridges together.



藤崎 一郎

一般社団法人日米協会 会長
元 在アメリカ合衆国特命全権大使

Ichiro Fujisaki

President, The America-Japan Society, Inc.
Former Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
of Japan to the United States

国際交流は大事だが厄介だ。交流自体は対立や紛争を阻止も解決もできない。しかしいったん終結すれば関係を回復するのに大きな効果を持つ。ポトマックの桜、日米学生会議など枚挙にいとまがない。言ってみれば形状記憶合金のようなものだ。その重要性は少し考えればわかるはずだ。

ところが同時に国際交流は厄介だ。言葉の壁も資金の壁もある。日程作成、アポ取り付け、移動のための航空券、宿舎の手配、現地交通手段の確保、同行など面倒な仕事が山ほどある。億劫になるのは当然だ。そこでカケハシ・プロジェクトが登場する。

私ども日米協会は毎年アメリカボウルという高校生英語クイズ大会をやっている。上位3校の高校生9人がワシントンDC訪問する。これはカケハシ・プロジェクトの一環として実現できている。カケハシ・プロジェクトを実施しているJICEの周到的な心配りにはいつも頭が下がる。

日本のいっそうの国際化のためカケハシ・プロジェクトの発展を祈る。

International exchanges are both important and cumbersome. Exchanges cannot prevent or halt confrontations. But once they are over, their role is significant in restoring relations. Cherry blossom trees at Tidal Basin, Japan-America Students Council, you name it. It's like a shape memory alloy.

However, it is cumbersome as well. There are language barriers and financial problems.

The importance is well understood, but not so easy to implement them. Here comes the KAKEHASHI Project.

The America-Japan Society of Tokyo hosts America Bowl annually. It is a high school student's English quiz contest. Winners or 9 students are sent to Washington D.C. This is possible because of KAKEHASHI Project. JICE people conducting the visit very sincerely and we are grateful to them.

For the further internationalization of Japan, we fervently hope for the continuance and development of KAKEHASHI Project.



Jean-François Renaud

First Secretary, Public Affairs – Premier Secrétaire, Affaires publiques
Embassy of Canada to Japan – Ambassade du Canada au Japon

On behalf of the Embassy of Canada to Japan, it is a pleasure and an honour to extend our heartfelt congratulations to the Japan International Cooperation Center (JICE) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan on the 10th anniversary of the KAKEHASHI Project—a testament to a decade of rich and meaningful exchange, and an inspiration for ever-deepening connection and friendship in the future.

Since its inception, the KAKEHASHI Project has played a vital role in strengthening the bonds of friendship and mutual understanding between Japan and North America. For Canada, this initiative has provided a meaningful platform for young Canadians to engage directly with Japanese society, culture, and values—nurturing a generation of globally aware and socially engaged leaders.

Welcoming KAKEHASHI delegations to the Embassy over the years has always been a true highlight. Each visit brought a spark of energy, leading to vibrant conversations and a refreshing diversity of perspectives. Participants' enthusiasm and openness remind us of the transformative power of youth-led engagement.

The values at the heart of KAKEHASHI—dialogue, mutual learning, and diversity—resonate deeply with those celebrated during Canada's participation in Expo 2025 Osaka. Under the theme of "Regeneration," the Canada Pavilion highlighted our shared commitment to sustainability, inclusion, and the power of human connection. This alignment underscores the enduring importance of people-to-people exchanges in shaping a more resilient and collaborative global community.

As we look ahead to 2028 and the 100th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Canada and Japan, the significance of such initiatives becomes even clearer. In a world facing complex and interconnected challenges—from climate resilience to social equity and digital transformation—youth engagement is essential in building inclusive, forward-looking societies. Programs like KAKEHASHI empower young leaders to think globally while acting locally in tangible, impactful ways.

We commend JICE and all partners involved for their unwavering dedication to nurturing these vital connections. To all past participants, thank you for your meaningful contributions to this journey. And to future participants, we can't wait to see how you'll carry the torch forward. May the next decade of KAKEHASHI Project continue to inspire and empower youth to build a more inclusive, peaceful, and interconnected world.



金城太一

文部科学省総合教育政策局
国際教育課長

Taichi Kaneshiro

Director, International Education Division, Education Policy Bureau,
Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports,
Science and Technology

北米と日本をつなぐ未来の架け橋

カケハシ・プロジェクト10周年にあたり、長年にわたり本事業を支えてこられた外務省、そして実施団体として尽力されてきた日本国際協力センター（JICE）の皆様へ、心より感謝申し上げます。記念誌の刊行にあたりご指名をいただきましたので、私が在米国日本大使館勤務（2021～2024年）でカケハシ・プロジェクトに深く関わった日々を思い返し筆をとりました。

私が大使館に赴任したのは、日本がコロナ禍のただ中であつた頃でした。多くの訪日プログラムが延期・中止となり、カケハシ・プロジェクトも例外ではありませんでしたが、2022年ようやく再開。再始動に向けて現場で奔走されたJICEの皆様のご努力を思うと胸が熱くなります。

特に心に残るのは、ワシントンDCで唯一日本語プログラムを持つコロンビアハイツ高校との交流です。経済的に厳しい環境にある生徒も多く、カケハシ・プロジェクトがなければ日本を訪れる機会はなかったかもしれません。訪日後に大使館を訪れた生徒たちが、ホームステイや現地高校生との交流で得た驚きや喜びを輝く瞳で語ってくれた姿は忘れられません。中には「もっと高度な日本語プログラムを作ってもらおうよう校長先生に提案します」と意気込む生徒もおり、異文化交流が人生の選択に影響を与える力を実感しました。

もう一つは2023年12月にJICEと共催した初の同窓会イベントでのこと。全米に散った同窓生を集めるのは至難の業ですがJICEの皆様のご尽力により結果的に40名以上も参加。実はJICEの皆様と対面でお会いするのはこの時が初めて。皆様がどれほど熱い思いで人的交流を支えてこられたかを肌身で実感しました。後日談として、この場で生まれたご縁は思いもよらぬ形で広がりました。翌年4月の岸田総理（当時）の公式訪米の際に、若者との交流プログラムの話が舞い込んでまいり私が候補者をピックアップしたのですが、イベントで知り合った優秀な学生に声をかけ、総理との意見交換に参加してもらう機会にもつながりました。

カケハシ・プロジェクトを通じて痛感するのは、人的交流こそが国と国の関係を支える基盤であるということです。育まれてきた10年の絆が、次の10年へ向けてさらに豊かに広がり、北米と日本の未来を照らす新たな架け橋となることを心より願っています。



コロンビアハイツ高校の表敬



同窓生イベントで同窓生、JICEの皆様と



神尾りさ

世田谷区議会議員
一般社団法人日本国際教育協会専務理事

Risa Kamio

Setagaya City Council Member
Executive Director, Japan Global Education

カケハシ・プロジェクト10周年記念、誠におめでとうございます。私は本プロジェクトに、米国勤務時代には派遣する側、日本では受け入れ側として関わりをもちました。

米国ワシントンで毎年開催される「米国ジャパンボウル大会」。日本語や日本文化に関する問題がクイズ形式で出題され、全米から日本語を学習中のアメリカ人高校生が出場します。本大会のディレクターを約10年務める間、毎年入賞者が日本に招聘されました。北米の若者たちと広島を訪れた際、平和について深く学んだ彼らの表情が印象的でした。また関西のホームステイ先で、本物の刀を見せてもらった若者の興奮する様子も鮮明に覚えています。

日本ではこの数年間、世田谷区議会議員として、ロサンゼルスからの日系米国人若手リーダーの受け入れを行っています。国際的にも魅力が評価されている下北沢のまちづくりについて、まち歩きをしながら紹介し、夜は議員仲間との交流会を実施しており、日米間の政治や社会の相違点などについて意見交換するとともに、異文化交流の場としても有益な機会となっています。

世界情勢は今まさに転換期にあります。カケハシ・プロジェクトが日本と北米間をつなぎ、お互いの国の言語や文化を行き来するかけはしとなる人材を育成することは、政治、経済、社会、文化、歴史、外国政策などの幅広い分野における理解を深めるのみならず、真の知日派・親日派の育成にもつながります。また、参加者が日本の魅力を積極的に発信したり、帰国後もアラムナイとして関係性を強化したりすることを通して、両国間における信頼関係の基盤づくりともなっており、ひいては国際情勢の安定にも寄与すると考えます。

カケハシ・プロジェクトの積み重ねによって、国家間に橋を架けるのみならず、その橋を何度も行き来し、関係性を補強し続けることにより、決して崩れることがない、信頼の道筋の構築につながることを信じ、今後の更なる発展に期待しています。





Bruce Batten

Resident Director,
Inter-University Center for Japanese Language Studies (IUC)

My KAKEHASHI Story

It is an honor to contribute my “My KAKEHASHI Story” and to congratulate everyone involved in the KAKEHASHI Project on its tenth anniversary. The project’s mission—to foster mutual trust and understanding among the peoples of Japan, the United States, and Canada—feels more important now than ever.

The Inter-University Center for Japanese Language Studies (IUC), located in Yokohama, is where advanced students of Japanese from North America and elsewhere come to complete their language training. Operated by a consortium of U.S. and Canadian universities, with Stanford University as the lead institution, IUC enrolls about 55 students each year in its 10-month academic program and 30–40 students in its short summer program.

In 2021, Japan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs and JICE asked IUC to help plan activities for American and Canadian KAKEHASHI participants scheduled to visit Japan in spring 2022. Although the visit was canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic, an online program was held instead, connecting KAKEHASHI participants and IUC students via Zoom.

Since then, IUC has participated in the KAKEHASHI Project each year through in-person events at Pacifico Yokohama. These gatherings typically bring together several dozen KAKEHASHI participants and around ten IUC students, who serve as *senpai*. The latter share firsthand experiences of participating in the JET Programme, working as translators or interpreters, studying abroad at Japanese universities, or pursuing graduate studies in Japanese Studies.

At first, I questioned whether IUC—whose students are non-Japanese—was a good fit for KAKEHASHI. I soon realized, however, that IUC students are effective role models who can offer practical and realistic guidance about academic and professional pathways.

These events are consistently rewarding. IUC students take their role as *senpai* seriously, while KAKEHASHI participants are enthusiastic and highly motivated. The energy is contagious, and everyone leaves feeling positive and optimistic about the future.

Some KAKEHASHI participants have gone on to apply to IUC. For example, one student in our current 2025–26 cohort first learned about IUC through his participation in the 2024 KAKEHASHI Project. His matriculation at IUC marks the completion of a virtuous circle. I hope to see many more such examples in the future.

Congratulations again on KAKEHASHI’s first ten years. IUC is proud to be part of this meaningful program.



IUC students introduce themselves to KAKEHASHI participants



Information on topics of interest is shared in small group sessions



Every event ends with a group photo shoot



Gabriel Rebeck

Japan Programs Director,
Lurasian Institution

Being part of the KAKEHASHI Project's ten-year legacy has been a profoundly rewarding journey for myself and my colleagues at Laurasian Institution. My own passion for exchange began with a homestay in Japan at age thirteen, an unforgettable experience that shaped my life's trajectory. Today, it is a privilege to contribute to programs such as KAKEHASHI, which help provide that same spark to the next generation.

The success of the KAKEHASHI Project is visible the moment we begin coordinating our itineraries. As Laurasian Institution reaches out to our expansive network of U.S. schools and organizations to invite their participation in upcoming programming, the response is immediate and enthusiastic. Our long-standing partners across the country are always eager to host events or collaborate on activities because they know that every KAKEHASHI group brings the unique possibility of new friendships. This excitement is a clear testament to the positive impact that KAKEHASHI student groups leave on every community they visit.

A cornerstone of our contribution is the Education Facilitators (EFs) whom Laurasian Institution carefully selects, trains, and provides for the program. More than just guides, these EFs ensure the educational depth of the experience by mentoring students as they navigate cultural nuances and helping them transform daily observations into deep, meaningful insights. It is so moving to see alumni reach out years later to reconnect with their EFs, proving that these aren't just one-week tours—they are the starting point for lifelong relationships.

Ultimately, the heart of the program is the connection between students. The speed at which these bonds form never ceases to inspire me. In 2023, we facilitated a visit for students from Keiwa Gakuen in Niigata to Howard University in Washington, D.C. Despite some initial shyness, they discovered a shared language of laughter and curiosity almost instantly. By their final reporting session, the group was inseparable, sharing jokes and filming TikTok dances together. It was from this cohort that one American student was later selected to address Prime Minister Kishida in Japanese, sharing how her KAKEHASHI experience had reshaped her vision for the future.

As we look ahead, Laurasian Institution is proud to continue contributing to the KAKEHASHI Project as it helps young people see one another not as distant "others," but as friends. In that way, we are building the future of U.S.-Japan relations, one conversation, one shared memory, and one TikTok dance at a time.



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Allan A Alvarez

Program for Asian Americans

- **Participation period:** Dec. 06 - 13, 2015
- **Status at the time of participation:** Working Professional
- **Current Status:** Working Professional
- **Current affiliation:** 1270AM KNDI Radio
- **Social Media:** [Facebook](#)

KAKEHASHI 2015 to Now

■ Memories from the program

In 2015, I was honored to be selected as one of the 10 Outstanding Asian Americans for the KAKEHASHI Project. For me, the program was more than an exchange—it was a bridge, true to its name, that connected not only cultures but also possibilities. I vividly remember the energy of the delegation, the warmth of our Japanese hosts, and the sense that we were planting seeds of friendship and collaboration that could grow far beyond the official itinerary. Among my most meaningful encounters was with Keiji Maki-san, a government participant I met during KAKEHASHI Project. Recently, I reunited with him in Kyoto, and our friendship has endured over the years. This personal bond is a living example of how KAKEHASHI Project fosters connections that transcend time, geography, and profession.

■ Life after the program

Fast forward to today, and I find myself acting on the inspiration that KAKEHASHI instilled in me. I have already established a *Godo Kaisha* (GK) in Tokyo, registered my company seal, and secured a local address in Minato-ku. With these foundations in place, I am building a cross-border business focused on real estate investment and immigration consulting—fields where I can leverage my experience as a U.S. attorney, realtor, and community

advocate. Few from my 2015 cohort may have pursued such direct and tangible ties to Japan, and I am proud to be carrying the spirit of KAKEHASHI into the business and professional world. For me, this is not just about entrepreneurship. It is about sustaining the bridges that KAKEHASHI built. By formalizing business operations in Japan, I am continuing the work of creating understanding, opportunity, and collaboration between Japan and the Filipino-American community I represent. Looking back, KAKEHASHI Project 2015 was a turning point—a reminder that heritage, identity, and international partnerships are not abstract ideals but living commitments. Today, as I work on building something concrete in Japan, I carry with me the lessons and friendships from that experience. KAKEHASHI means “bridge,” and in my life, it has been exactly that—a bridge from cultural exchange to meaningful, lasting impact.

■ Message for the future

KAKEHASHI Project is more than a trip—it’s a bridge. My 2015 journey gave me friendships, inspiration, and the courage to build lasting ties in Japan. Step into this experience with an open heart—you may find it transforms your future in ways you cannot yet imagine.





Kelly Takasu

Program for Japanese American Youth (JACL)

- ❑ **Participation period:** Dec. 15 - 22, 2015
- ❑ **Status at the time of participation:** Working Professional
- ❑ **Current Status:** Working Professional
- ❑ **Current affiliation:** Alzheimer's Los Angeles
- ❑ **Social Media:** [LinkedIn](#)

KELLY TAKASU 高須 ケリー

■ Memories from the program

In 2015 I participated in the KAKEHASHI Project as a chaperone for a group of Japanese American college students in partnership with the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL). The home stay was the most memorable part of the trip. Our host family, and the entire community were so welcoming. Our hosts cooked the biggest pot of Oden, clearly cooked with love, and invited us to sit with them under the warmth of the *Kotatsu*. We visited local temples, made crafts and pounded Mochi at the local community center, and enjoyed Kaiten Sushi. I loved visiting an art project of stuffed people and a roadside winter light display in the dark countryside. It was hard to say goodbye at the end of our visit.



■ Life after the program

I continue to support the program by reading applications for future KAKEHASHI Project cohorts. There are so many students who are interested in visiting Japan, many for the first time. As a Yonsei, fourth generation Japanese American, I was born and raised in America, but Japanese culture is still deeply instilled in my daily life. Since the program, I've gotten married and started my own family. We travel to Japan regularly to visit my husband's family and participate in the Japanese American community events locally to ensure that the next generation feels connected to our culture.

■ Message for the future

The need for understanding and empathy is even more important in today's political climate. Fear fuels hate, war, and destruction. By taking the time to learn more about another person's culture and experience it, you are taking a step towards building peace.





Clara Kumagai

Program for University Students (University of British Columbia)

- Participation period: Feb. 14 - 20, 2016
- Status at the time of participation: Graduate Student
- Current Status: Working Professional
- Current affiliation: Writer
- Social Media: [Instagram](#)

■ Memories from the program

I took part in the KAKEHASHI Project in 2016 with the University of British Columbia. At the time I was doing a MFA in Creative Writing and had just begun to study Japanese. I am Japanese, Irish and Canadian, but I hadn't been in Japan for about ten years. I was beginning a novel which was set in Japan, so the KAKEHASHI Project was a wonderful opportunity for me to not just visit Japan but get an insight from perspectives that I couldn't have if I'd gone on a research trip or visited family. It was fascinating to be part of a group with a wide variety of experiences; one other participant was also half-Japanese, while others had never been to Japan; we were studying subjects from anthropology and archeology to business. Together, we all brought different perspectives and ideas to the trip. In Tokyo, we visited the Reconstruction Agency to learn about the work that was being done in the aftermath of the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami, which was especially interesting to me because that's what my novel was inspired by. We also went to Hokkaido, where we visited the Center for Ainu and Indigenous Studies, where we learned about the revival in Ainu culture and tradition after hundreds of years of Japanese colonisation. I believe it is essential to learn about the history of a country in this way; to truly engage with a place we must learn about the complexities of its past; without that we cannot understand the present, and much less change its future.

■ Life after the program

This learning and engagement continued after we returned to Canada. The following year, I decided to move to Japan, where I lived in Tokyo for five years, teaching at Tsuda University and Tama Art University. It was there that I completed my first novel "Catfish Rolling", and began my second, "Songs for Ghosts". Although I have since moved back to Ireland, my engagement with Japan and Canada remains strong. I was delighted to have the Canadian book launch of "Catfish Rolling" in conjunction with the KAKEHASHI Project and the Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada in 2023, in the Japan Foundation in Toronto. This past summer, I did events at the Irish Pavilion at the EXPO 2025 Osaka Kansai, where I saw the bridges that were being built between Japan and countries across the globe.

■ Message for the future

KAKEHASHI Project is one that I hope many others will continue to participate in. Not only was it an important and informative experience but I formed connections and friendships that have lasted through the years. Forming bridges and creating connections has been central to my writing; I aim to introduce readers to Japanese culture, history and society, and explore both differences and commonalities. I hope to show Japan's past and present and future, and to encourage a multicultural and diverse vision of the future.





Katlin Long-Wright

Program for University Students (University of British Columbia)

- **Participation period:** Feb. 14 - 20, 2016
- **Status at the time of participation:** University Student
- **Current Status:** Working Professional
- **Current affiliation:** Archaeologist

■ Memories from the program

I absolutely marvelled at the precision, delicacy, and discipline the Japanese performed all their tasks with. From serving cuisine of all varieties, to preparing and pouring tea, and even how they conducted themselves professionally. Two moments stand out in particular. The first, was at the TOYOTA MEGA WEB located on the artificial island of Odaiba. The staff here were incredibly knowledgeable and enthusiastic about the state of automobile engineering and where they saw the future of transportation technology going. The second, was at the SAPPORO BREWERIES located in Hokkaido, Japan's northern-most island. Here, we were treated to something uncanny. The younger bartender poured draught into a clear stein to a point where it would seemingly overflow, but he took a flat metal tool and with a precise swipe, removed the excess head and served the beer. Additionally, I met a JET Programme official during the program, who encouraged me to apply for the program. So, I did, and I spent an incredible year in Omagari city, Akita Prefecture as an ALT for the JET Programme. I got to join an incredible community of educators in one of the largest Junior High Schools in northern Japan -- I cried heavily at my farewell ceremony as the students brought hand drawn pictures of me, encouraging notes for my success in the future, and souvenirs (*omiyage*) to bring back to Canada. I also made lifelong friends in the surf community of the Oga Peninsula, the amateur Sumo league in Akita City, and a host of fellow ALTs from disparate countries. Life changing is not sufficient enough a term to describe the positive impact my time in Japan has had on my life, my mindset, and my work ethic. I am indebted to, in awe of, and here for, the Japanese people.

■ Life after the program

Currently, I am a full-time archaeologist for Stantec Consulting in Canada, partnering with Indigenous communities and clients, largely from the energy sector, to identify areas of potential impact to ancestral lands and providing advice for mitigation. I am also a PhD Candidate at the University of Toronto's Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations department with research focuses on digital competency in geographical software and the digitization of legacy datasets to study prehistoric communities and their organization. Seeing the engagement and practical application of archaeology between the faculty at Hokkaido University with a member of the Ainu community encouraged me to pursue the same sort of relationship in my own career. I stay in touch with many friends from Akita Prefecture, and Japan, some of who I continue to go on travels with and practice my Japanese language skills.

■ Message for the future

One day, I would love to return and contribute to the ever-expanding knowledge on Japan's prehistoric eras, such as the Jomon and the precontact Ainu periods. Take what I learned from the Japanese people and apply it to your own life and work - Do not take yourself too seriously, but take your work seriously. Work hard to achieve your dreams but remember to laugh often. Support others and yourself with daily affirmations for success in everything you set your mind to. *Ganbatte!*





Sara Agate

Program for Hispanic Caucus University Students

- ▣ **Participation period:** Mar. 23 - 30, 2016
- ▣ **Status at the time of participation:** Working Professional
- ▣ **Current Status:** Working Professional
- ▣ **Current affiliation:** Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute
- ▣ **Social Media:** [LinkedIn](#)

People are Bridges to Peacebuilding

■ Memories from the program

In 2016, as a Health Graduate Fellow in the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute (CHCI) program, our fellowship cohort joined the KAKEHASHI Project through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan on a transformative journey to learn about history, diplomacy, and the responsibility we each carry to build a more peaceful world with Japan. This once in a lifetime opportunity immersed us in Japan. We explored Ginza, observed Japan's political life at the National Diet, rode the bullet train, enjoyed the warmth of a family homestay, visited Miyajima Island, and much more. Yet, even with all these unforgettable moments, the heart of the program revealed itself most powerfully in Hiroshima Prefecture. Listening to survivors of World War II share their experiences added an even deeper weight to the visit. Their willingness to recount unimaginable loss not to provoke anger, but to advocate for peace, moved me to tears. From them, I learned one of the most important messages I have ever carried with me: that our greatest responsibility is to live in peace — with each other, with our histories, and with the world we are shaping for future generations. Standing before the Atomic Bomb Dome, originally built in 1915 and one of the few buildings left standing after the bombing was profoundly humbling. The blast struck almost directly overhead, which spared the building from complete collapse. Today, it stands not only as a remnant of destruction, but as a universal symbol of peace. Another symbol of peace are the paper cranes inspired by the story of Sadako Sasaki, a young girl who was exposed to the atomic bomb and later died of leukemia. Standing on that ground while recognizing the human stories and the silence it represents shapes how I live in the world.

■ Life after the program

Since returning home, staying connected with the KAKEHASHI alumni community has been one of the most rewarding aspects of the program. It is a network grounded in respect, curiosity, and the belief that cross-cultural understanding creates lasting change. Nearly a decade later, I still carry the lessons of that journey. KAKEHASHI Project taught me that bridges are not metaphors, they are responsibilities. When we build them with empathy, intentionality, and a commitment to peace, to strengthen the world we share.

■ Message for the future

Choose curiosity, choose connection, choose collaboration, and above all live in peace. The KAKEHASHI Project taught me when we truly listen to one another, we build bridges that help us understand our world and our place within it. Learn from the stories that challenge you, invest in the relationships that expand your perspective, and live in the moment because this is the essence of our humankind. May the partnership between the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute and the KAKEHASHI Project continue to build bridges. Peace is not passive; peace is a daily commitment to act. *Gracias/arigato gozaimasu*/thank you.



My KAKEHASHI Stories

- Inbound Programs FY2016 -

- **Andrew Kincare** --- Program for Business School (Economics)
- **Kylie Bernard** --- Program for Japanese American Youth (JAACL)
- **Amy Serena Vatcha** --- Program for University Students (University of California Berkeley)
- **Jason Langsner** --- Program for Jewish Americans (B'nai B'rith International)
- **Brandon Lee Stuart** --- Program for Black Caucus University Students



Andrew Kincare

Program for Business School (Economics)

- ❑ **Participation period:** Dec. 12 - 20, 2016
- ❑ **Status at the time of participation:** University Student
- ❑ **Current Status:** Working Professional
- ❑ **Current affiliation:** Government Accountability Office
- ❑ **Social Media:** [LinkedIn](#)

■ Memories from the program

KAKEHASHI Project offered an incredible and unforgettable experience to me, with the opportunity to speak with government officials, meet with business owners, and stay with a homestay family, all while making lifelong connections during and after the program. I was part of the Economics program in Dec. 2016, as part of a group of 20 students from my graduate school. I vividly remember visiting Japanese government ministries, such as the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF) in Tokyo, where we learned about Japan's imports and exports of farm-grown products. Our group also visited Gunma prefecture, where we learned about silk production in Kiryu City, which was so interesting. We visited a Toyota factory and saw the automated assembly machines at work, and I was so impressed by the advanced technology involved. We also visited a fabric dye manufacturer, and it was incredible to see how the different colors were mixed and the intricate patterns that were created on cloth items. I was surprised to see such a high level of craftsmanship and dedication to quality and efficiency at each business we visited. Our tour guide was phenomenal and interpreted all the information from our business and government ministry visits quickly and accurately, in addition to helping us with all travel logistics.

One of my favorite memories is of staying with a homestay family in Minakami village. They were wonderful hosts and made us a great meal and took us to the hot springs nearby. I had a chance to practice my Japanese during our stay and help translate for the hosts and students.

We did many fun cultural activities as well, such as wearing kimonos and doing Shibori tie-dyeing. We also visited shrines and temples, met with the mayor of Kiryu City, rode in special electric buses that were designed to reduce green house gas emissions, and explored various interesting historical and cultural sites in Gunma Prefecture and Tokyo.

We had very good food the entire trip and I was never hungry. One of my favorite meals was in Kiryu when we had an *udon* dish with large noodles called "*himokawa*". We also had delicious sushi, *kaisen donburi* (seafood rice bowl), *nabe* (hot pot), and many other wonderful dishes.

■ Life after the program

After the program, I stayed in touch with fellow KAKEHASHI participants and met up for Japanese food and other activities, such as visiting the Japanese gardens in San Diego. I continued studying Japanese and went to Japan for summer internships the following year. I continue to stay in touch with Japanese friends and I lead the Japanese language club at my workplace. I meet with fellow KAKEHASHI alumni regularly and I always encourage my friends to visit Japan, try Japanese food, and watch Japanese movies and shows. I was even able to meet with a KAKEHASHI alumni friend at the 2025 Osaka World Expo last year. I will never forget my experience on the KAKEHASHI Project trip, and always value my connection to Japan!

■ Message for the future

KAKEHASHI Project is a very special program that can change your perspective and widen your horizons, and show many of the wonderful things Japan has to offer, from cultural experiences to business opportunities, and beautiful natural scenery to international friendships. It is worth applying for this opportunity if possible, because it is educational and fun, and can introduce you to new ideas and people and foster an increased appreciation of Japan. The program is very well organized and facilitated, so each day will bring memorable experiences and adventures, new horizons and connections, and of course amazing food!





Kylie Bernard

Program for Japanese American Youth (JACL)

- ❑ **Participation period:** Dec. 13 - 20, 2016
- ❑ **Status at the time of participation:** University Student
- ❑ **Current Status:** Working Professional
- ❑ **Current affiliation:** Razorfish
- ❑ **Social Media:** [LinkedIn](#)

From Tokyo to Taiki

■ Memories from the program

As someone who grew up reading manga, eating *takuan*, and coveting every phone call and visit with my grandparents so I could practice speaking the little Japanese I knew, embarking on my first trip to Japan as a participant of the KAKEHASHI Project was a significant and one of the most memorable experiences I've had. I didn't know many Japanese growing up in Colorado, and meeting so many other young "Nikkei" from various backgrounds was exciting for me. Having a sense of immediate shared connection with the other participants was special, as was being able to learn more about our heritage together. When I think back on my experience 9 years ago, I remember immediately feeling enamored of Tokyo. The vibrancy, the cleanliness, and just sheer size of it was unlike anything I had seen before. We traveled to Mie prefecture, where we visited the stately Ise Jingu, fought the cold winter ocean gusts to catch glimpses of *Meoto Iwa*, and warmed up with grilled *mitarashi dango* in Okake Yokocho. Eventually we made our way to the town of Taiki, where we were greeted with a taiko drum performance and our eager host families. My host family was sweet and hospitable, ensuring that we get a true taste of typical Japanese life through food and simple moments. We huddled and ate persimmon under a *kotatsu*, made *takoyaki* and *yakisoba* over a hot plate, took walks along the coast and to the local shrine. Our host dad took us on a ride in his boat in Nishiki bay, where he would fish. While I loved Tokyo and Nagoya and the other cities we had visited during my trip, it is my time in Taiki that I remember best.

■ Life after the program

Life after KAKEHASHI Project has brought a lot of new experiences – graduating, moving to NYC, traveling, and trying new things, including Japanese class. After years of on-and-off studying on my own, I began taking classes at the beginning of 2024. I visited Japan again for the first time since the program last October with my mom and sister, and I'm going back next spring. I try to discover a bit more of Japan every time I visit, and I think part of me is scheming to live there at some point in my life.

■ Message for the future

There are few things I find more important than human connection, especially in an age where there are so many forces working against it. I participated in the KAKEHASHI Project as a means to learn more about my heritage, but also ended up meeting a lot of smart and interesting "Nikkei" as well as Japanese nationals. While differences in culture and language might make the barrier to connecting a little more difficult, approaching others with an open mind and a willingness to learn is a valuable thing. Humanity is shared!





Amy Serena Vatcha

Program for University Students (University of California Berkeley)

- ❑ **Participation period:** Jan. 09 - 16, 2017
- ❑ **Status at the time of participation:** University Student
- ❑ **Current Status:** Working Professional
- ❑ **Current affiliation:** Salesforce
- ❑ **Social Media:** [LinkedIn](#)

Reflections of a KAKEHASHI Alum, 8 Years Later

■ Memories from the program

The KAKEHASHI Project was an unforgettable journey for 22 students from the Haas School of Business at UC Berkeley, offering a deep dive into Japan's unique mix of tradition and innovation. Over one fast-paced week, we explored four cities: Tokyo, Kobe, Osaka, and Nara. Traveling at speeds of 200 mph on the shinkansen bullet trains gave us a taste of Japan's efficiency and modernity. Our business-focused itinerary included visits to the *Daikin* showroom, a *sake* factory, and a basket weaver's workshop. These visits showed how industries remain rooted in tradition while thriving through innovation. In Nara, we stayed at a traditional Japanese *ryokan*, soaking in the serenity of the tatami rooms. Feeding famous bowing deer and visiting historic shrines added a magical, cultural depth to the trip. This was more than sightseeing. It was a living lesson in how heritage and business blend beautifully in Japan. We were fortunate to receive incredible support from our Berkeley-Haas professor and chaperone, as well as our local host and guide. I am grateful to the Japan International Cooperation Center (JICE) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for making this incredible journey possible.

■ Life after the program

Since completing KAKEHASHI Project, I have stayed deeply connected to Japan. In September 2023, I attended the KAKEHASHI Project reunion in Los Angeles at the Japan Foundation. Our shared experience immediately bonded us. Professionally, KAKEHASHI Project opened doors. Just four months after returning from the program, I started an internship at Salesforce, a leading customer relationship management (CRM) company.

Over the years, I advanced my career to become a Finance Solutions Manager. In September 2024, I had the incredible opportunity to return to Japan on a business trip with Salesforce to represent my department at a Business Process Innovation workshop. The workshop focused on principles similar to Lean Six Sigma, aiming to improve efficiency and streamline processes through quantitative methods and optimization. Although my leadership supported me, my prior immersion in the KAKEHASHI Project equipped me with a unique edge in navigating Japan's culture and business. This included important customs such as the respectful exchange of business cards, using the "san" honorific, and handling monetary exchanges with Japanese etiquette. These cultural competencies helped me engage confidently during my business trip. Returning to Japan felt like a full-circle moment, and I realized how much I had grown both professionally and personally since my KAKEHASHI Project journey.

■ Message for the future

In today's divided world, building cultural bridges is more important than ever. Japan offers valuable lessons in innovation, hospitality, cleanliness, and universal healthcare, which America can learn and benefit from. Adaptability and cultural fluency are a mindset and muscle that strengthen with practice. KAKEHASHI Project provided dynamic environments that encouraged experiential learning and self-discovery. I hope the KAKEHASHI Project has as profound an impact on your life as it did on mine. It will challenge you, inspire you, and change how you see the world and yourself.





Jason Langsner

Program for Jewish Americans (B'nai B'rith International)

- Participation period: Mar. 05 - 12, 2017
- Status at the time of participation: Working Professional
- Current Status: Working Professional
- Current affiliation: B'nai B'rith International
- Social Media: [LinkedIn](#)

Japan: Nine Years Later

Memories from the program

Nine years ago, I stepped off of a plane in Tokyo. My KAKEHASHI trip for young Jewish Americans, in partnership with B'nai B'rith International, helped to build bridges. B'nai B'rith was founded in 1843 as our community's oldest human rights and humanitarian organization. I was honored to be asked to join a group of peers in our 20s and 30s to strengthen ties between Jewish Americans, Japan, the Japanese Jewish Community, and the United States. I vividly remember Shabbat in Shibuya, Tokyo and visiting the Chabad of Kobe. Those were spiritual experiences that brought my tripmates and I closer to world Jewry, but I'll also never forget watching the Team Israel baseball team play in the Tokyo Dome during The World Baseball Classic – guests of The Israeli Embassy of Japan – during the Jewish holiday of Purim. That will be a lifelong memory and one that wasn't even on our itinerary but our JICE organizers helped make possible for us. I'll also remember learning about Chiune Sugihara, who was a Japanese diplomat who was serving in Lithuania when it was not safe to be Jewish in Europe; and how he issued transit visas to thousands of Jews, allowing them to escape to Japan and other countries to flee the Nazis. It pulled me back to visiting the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum and Yad Vashem in Israel – to learn about “The Righteous Gentiles” whose heroism allowed my people to survive a genocide. My trip's memories include delicious sushi and ramen dinners, discussing Japan-U.S. and Japan-Israeli relations with life-long friends, and marveling at the high-speed rail.

Life after the program

And as a Washingtonian, my experiences exploring Tokyo, Kobe, Hiroshima's history didn't end when I returned home. I've since been able to visit The Japanese Embassy in Washington, host Shabbat dinners for other KAKEHASHI alumni in our area, annually visit the Cherry Blossoms – a gift from Japan – at The Tidal Basin in DC, and attend cultural events. KAKEHASHI brought me closer to Japan nine years ago -- just one year after this program was started. And it continues to keep me closer to the Japanese people, especially its Jewish community.

Message for the future

I turned 44 this year. I have a wife and two beautiful/wonderful daughters now. When I went on my KAKEHASHI trip I was dating my now wife and the trip will always be special to our family because my now wife moved into my home right before I left -- she even walked my dog while I was in Japan. I was 35 when I went on the trip. A lot has changed in these nine, almost ten years, since my trip; but my appreciation for the opportunity has not and will not at any time. I hope many more young Jewish Americans get the experience to visit Japan and to see the country through their own eyes, but also to meet the Japanese people and experience the land/culture of what Japan has to offer. I now work at The Washington Post (as shown in the recent photo). I didn't when I left. And I often find myself gravitating to the news that we publish about Japan, perhaps because I have a sense of connection to the people that I met during my trip. Japan is not just islands in the Pacific Ocean for me anymore. It's people I've met. It's places I've prayed. It's culture I've experienced.



Brandon Lee Stuart

Program for Black Caucus University Students

- ❑ **Participation period:** Mar. 16 - 23, 2017
- ❑ **Status at the time of participation:** University Student
- ❑ **Current Status:** Working Professional
- ❑ **Current affiliation:** ICONICCLASS
- ❑ **Social Media:** [LinkedIn](#), [Instagram](#)

An Experience Can Reflect a Lifetime

■ Memories from the program

It had been 12 years since I set foot in Japan as a high school junior. In the time that had lapsed between traveling to Japan in 2005 and participating in the KAKEHASHI Project in 2017, I had gone on to study Japanese in school for eight years, graduate with a degree in Behavioral Biology and East Asian Studies, intern with the East Asia-Japan Program at the Stimson Center in Washington, D.C., and complete my master's thesis entitled "Preserving Japan's 'Pacifist' National Identity: Historical Discourse & the Psychocultural Shame-Guilt Complex" (日本の戦争拒否に対する社会的認識: 日本の防衛政策、安全保証、および愛国心の関係). So, it was only natural to find Japan had blossomed and gone through its own transformation. Because change is inevitable. 変化は避けられない。

The only thing constant in this world is change. Yet, I couldn't help but become reacquainted with the warm feeling that made leaving so hard all those years ago. Equipped with the vivid memories of a kid who had started learning Japanese at the age of 13, this time around I saw Japan through the eyes of an adult anxious to build upon his first encounter. もっと経験しなくちゃいけなかった。And so, I did. By virtue of being immersed in a culture reified by aesthetic scenery and simplistic living, I took on a heightened sense of perspective that enabled me to discover more about myself alone and in relation to my surroundings. This encouraged me to seize each and every opportunity to exercise my Japanese language skills, and embrace traditions and customs to broaden my capacity for engaging in intercultural exchange and understanding. I remember conversations around US-Japan bilateral relations at The Matsushita Institute of Government and Management (公益財団法人松下幸之助記念志財団), hanging out at Ōwakudani (大涌谷) in Hakone, catching glimpses of Mt. Fuji (富士山) while traveling between Kanagawa and Shizuoka prefectures, and もちろんなるべく天ぷらも鍋物を食べようとしてた! These are fond memories that remain with me today as an interdisciplinary artist working in music production and sound design, acting and filmmaking, and movement wellness.

■ Life after the program

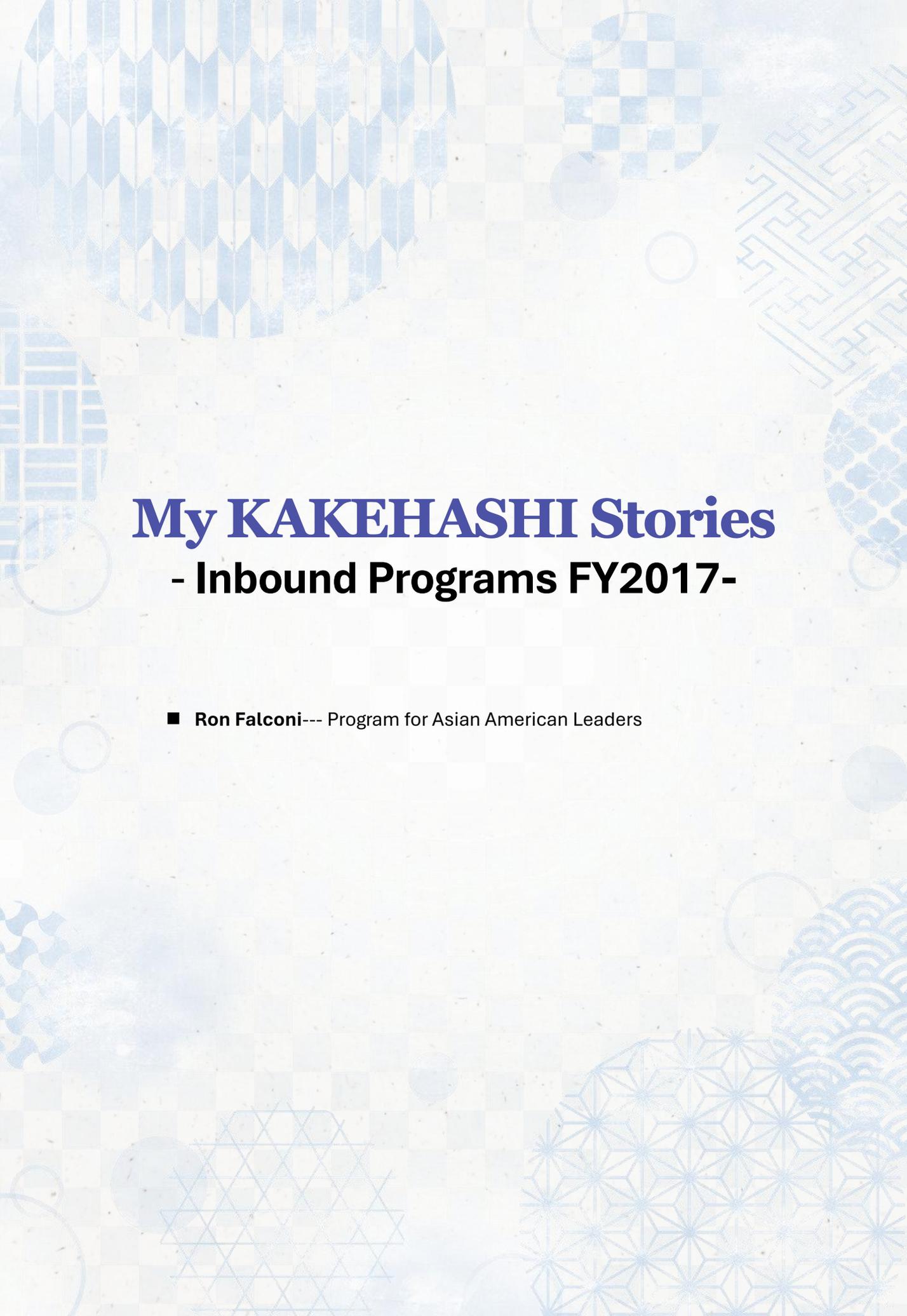
I'm grateful for the role this experience has played in furthering my commitment to learning and understanding 生き甲斐, or my reason for being. Since founding the creative collective ICONICCLASS in 2019, I've been bringing together rosters of artists from different mediums and modalities to collaborate on projects advocating for social change.

The interconnection of creative skillsets and ideas within safe shared spaces allows for meaningful reflection on the past in the present for a more abundant future.

■ Message for the future

The beauty of "difference" through the lens of language and culture is one that cannot be truly appreciated through binoculars from afar. There is something so sublime and rich about acquainting oneself with them through journeying to distant lands where they await sharing space with open hearts and open minds. Nothing in this world is an isolated occurrence, neither our lives nor our energy. Therefore, I encourage participants past, present, and future to use what time and what space we have to build bridges that circle the world over in a compassionate embrace.





My KAKEHASHI Stories

- Inbound Programs FY2017-

■ **Ron Falconi**--- Program for Asian American Leaders



Ron Falconi

Program for Asian American Leaders

- ❑ **Participation period:** Oct. 08 - 21, 2017
- ❑ **Status at the time of participation:** Working Professional
- ❑ **Current Status:** Working Professional
- ❑ **Current affiliation:** City of Brunswick
- ❑ **Social Media:** [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#)

Asian American Leadership - KAKEHASHI 2017

■ Memories from the program

In 2017, I had the distinct honor of being selected as one of only ten Asian American and Pacific Islander leaders from across the United States to participate in the KAKEHASHI Project. The program's mission was to act as a bridge between our two cultures. It was a privilege and an honor to be a part of this very important cultural and diplomatic initiative. The ten of us traveled to Tokyo, Hiroshima, and Kyoto—three cities that each embody a unique aspect of Japan's national identity and history. Throughout the trip, I was deeply impressed by the hospitality, professionalism, and meticulous attention to detail shown by JICE and the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Every moment was carefully planned to ensure our comfort and engagement. Despite my fish allergy, they went above and beyond to make sure my dietary needs were accommodated without any inconvenience. It gave me the opportunity to try the delicious Japanese cuisine. Their thoughtfulness extended even further when they learned I was Roman Catholic—they arranged for me to attend Sunday Mass at a historic Franciscan church in Tokyo, with a JICE representative personally escorting me to and from the service. That gesture of respect and consideration left a lasting impression on me. We also had the privilege of meeting with several Japanese government officials and local leaders. These conversations offered valuable insights into Japan's policies, economy, and global outlook, as well as the nation's efforts to foster stronger international partnerships. Yet, the most meaningful interactions for me were with Japanese high school students. We exchanged stories about our daily lives, our families, and their aspirations for the future. I was deeply impressed by their curiosity, drive and determination. Despite the differences in our cultures and languages, our shared humanity was unmistakable.

■ Life after the program

After returning home, I continued my service as Mayor of Brunswick, Ohio. Earlier this month, I was honored to be re-elected to fourth term. The lessons and friendships I gained from the KAKEHASHI Project were inspiring and unforgettable. After all these years, I remain in contact with several of my fellow participants. I was graciously invited to the home of the Consul General of Japan in Detroit and have since maintained contact with his successors. I even visited the Embassy of Japan in Washington, D.C., to share my reflections on this wonderful program with Japanese government officials. The KAKEHASHI Project made such a positive and enduring impact on my life that I encouraged my own daughter to apply when she was in college—and I was overjoyed when she, too, was selected to participate. She had an equally wonderful experience, and in a heartwarming full-circle moment, a representative from JICE from my 2017 trip served as a group leader for her in 2024!

■ Message for the future

I wish a very Happy 10th Anniversary to the KAKEHASHI Project. I thank you for allowing me to be a part of this worthwhile endeavor! I hope it continues to foster mutual respect, trust, and understanding between the Japanese and the American people. It was a once in a lifetime experience that I will treasure forever.



My KAKEHASHI Stories

- Inbound Programs FY2018 -

- **Juscenta Haligowski**--- Program for High School Students (Miles Macdonell Collegiate)
- **Ana Lian** --- Program for TOMODACHI KAKEHASHI Inouye Scholars Program (Miami Dade College)
- **Amani Moore** --- Program for CBCF Emerging Leaders
- **Jannett Lopez-Nelson** --- Program for University Students (University of North Georgia)
- **Vanessa Reyes** --- Program for University Students (University of North Georgia)



Juscenta (Jessie) Haligowski

Program for High School Students (Miles Macdonell Collegiate)

- ❑ **Participation period:** Jan. 28 - Feb. 05, 2019
- ❑ **Status at the time of participation:** High School Student
- ❑ **Current Status:** University Student
- ❑ **Current affiliation:** University of Winnipeg
- ❑ **Social Media:** [LinkedIn](#), [Instagram](#), [Instagram](#)

The everlasting impact of my KAKEHASHI exchange

■ Memories from the program

Memories of the KAKEHASHI Project: I have been interested in Japanese language and culture since I was 9 years old. Back then, Japanese culture felt so incredibly different to my own Indigenous culture, so I was intrigued and really wanted to learn more. I learned on my own for many years, until I entered high school where I was able to take Japanese language every year. In my 3rd year, I had the wonderful chance of participating in the KAKEHASHI Project and it was life changing. When we arrived in Tokyo, I felt that the research I had been doing on Japanese language and culture finally came to life. Of course, we had to go to the *Konbini* to get all the best snacks! The next day, we ate *Ekiben* (train station lunch boxes) and rode the *Shinkansen* to Nagoya. We visited Nagoya Castle and then went to Toyota City, for a special tour of a Toyota Factory! It was so amazing to see Japanese innovative technology and efficiency in real time. The next day, we went to a local high school to experience a day in the life of a student. To this day, I still write pen pal letters with one of the girls I met that day from the high school! Then, we went to our homestays in the beautiful mountainous countryside of Mie Prefecture! Our host grandmas were so wonderful and welcoming, they embraced us as their own children and took the best care of us. We did *Karaoke*, went to the *Onsen*, and made *Ohagi*, which is a sweet using red bean paste and glutinous rice. Best of all, we participated in "*Setsubun*", a festival where you throw roasted soybeans to cast out evil spirits! We went to the Buddhist temple and enjoyed the festivities. To end our trip, we returned to Tokyo, where we did some shopping at Tokyo Decks mall, walked around Harajuku and Meiji-Jingu Shrine, and then took in the dazzling sights of the Shibuya Scramble Crossing. I will never ever forget the wonderful time I had.

■ Life after the program

Life after the KAKEHASHI Project: 6 years later, I am in my last year of university doing a double degree in Communications and East Asian Language & Culture. I took Japanese classes at the university level, but I still wanted more! So, in April, I went to Tokyo for language immersion and study. I never imagined going to Japan on my own and being able to hold conversations, but there I was! After I finish my master's degree, I plan to go back to Japan again to get my Ph.D in International Culture and Communications! KAKEHASHI Project really made me realize my goals and dreams of being able to live in Japan for a while, and I am so incredibly grateful for that.

■ Message for the future

To future participants... please please please live your exchange to the fullest! Try EVERYTHING, even if it is out of your comfort zone. Take bites of food you have never tried before, volunteer for special experiences, and ask questions about the life stories of people that you meet. You won't regret it! This was my motto when I went on my KAKEHASHI Project exchange, and I found that not only did I have some great experiences that I wouldn't expect, but I also felt satisfied knowing I did my best to get the most out of my trip.





Ana Lian

Program for TOMODACHI KAKEHASHI Inouye Scholars Program (Miami Dade College)

- ❑ **Participation period:** Feb. 19 - 26, 2019
- ❑ **Status at the time of participation:** University Student
- ❑ **Current Status:** Working Professional
- ❑ **Current affiliation:** KPMG

■ Memories from the program

I participated in the KAKEHASHI Inouye Program in February 2019 through an exchange with students from Kumamoto University. The program began in Tokyo, where we explored the city through cultural activities. We visited Meiji Jingu, Shibuya, and Shinjuku Chuo Park to name a few. I will never forget the late nights wandering Tokyo's streets and absorbing its energy. We then transitioned to Kumamoto, which became my favorite part of the program. I lived with a host family who welcomed me into their home. They cooked for us daily, and I grew accustomed to saying "itadakimasu" before every meal.

■ Message for the future

I was only 19 years old, and it planted the seeds of diplomacy. I learned that cultural exchange cannot be taught in a textbook: it requires lived experience, stepping into another person's shoes, and opening myself to their way of life. Since then, I have graduated from the University of Southern California with both a bachelor's and master's in engineering, and I now work in New York City with KPMG's cybersecurity practice. I have led education initiatives in Indonesia, remain deeply engaged with the Asia Society in New York, and continue to pursue opportunities that bridge cultures.

■ Life after the program

I feel lucky to have experienced firsthand the depth of Japanese hospitality. I even planted my own tree, a symbol of the connections and memories that would grow long after I left. We also engaged in activities with students from Kumamoto University, building friendships across cultures. A few months later, we hosted them in the United States and shared our city through new adventures.





Amani Moore

Program for CBCF Emerging Leaders

- ❑ **Participation period:** Mar. 10 - 17, 2019
- ❑ **Status at the time of participation:** University Student
- ❑ **Current Status:** Working Professional
- ❑ **Current affiliation:** The Law Office of Albert Moore
- ❑ **Social Media:** [LinkedIn](#)

■ Memories from the program

The KAKEHASHI Project was a wonderful opportunity for me, and the other members of my cohort, to immerse in Japan’s culture, history, and government. From our flight from D.C., to our last goodbyes, each moment was one to cherish. Our cohort learned about Japanese culture and history whilst juxtaposing our understanding of American governance with Japan’s. Over the course of our program, we visited the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the National Diet, and visited Hokkaido University’s Graduate School of Public Policy. Our excursions in Tokyo were phenomenal; overall, each activity we did holds a special place in my heart. Yet, our excursions in Sapporo, Hokkaido are my most cherished. During our stay, our cohort stayed with host families. My host family consisted of four people plus two other people from my cohort. This was my first experience with a host family, but over the span of two days, I did not mind calling them family. We had wonderful homemade food and attended a “Welcome Party” organized by a local elementary school where we played traditional Japanese children’s games—an experience I will never forget and for that I am grateful. In Sapporo, I learned about the Ainu, the indigenous people of Hokkaido, and other aspects of Hokkaido’s history. We visited a Shinto Shrine, ate wonderful food, and met great people. The experience had a profound impact and left me yearning to see more in spite of the cold snow!

■ Life after the program

After our program ended, we returned to D.C. and met with individuals at the Embassy of Japan. My intentions were to remain in contact with persons I met during the program as I enjoyed learning about different cultures and had a background in international affairs. Unfortunately, the Covid-19 Pandemic the following year impeded my efforts to maintain steady contact or return to Japan. Currently, I am an attorney located in the Southeastern United States. The KAKEHASHI Project influenced my path by securing my fondness for intercultural exchanges and the pursuit of knowledge as I enjoy learning about cultures different from my own.

■ Message for the future

For the future, I hope that the KAKEHASHI Project continues to usher in new participants to inspire burgeoning talent in the arts, sciences, and civics. Technology has allowed us to have a plethora of information at our fingertips, but nothing beats being able to see everything in real time. Document what you see, learn from your mistakes, and keep your ears open for new things.





Jannett Lopez-Nelson

Program for University Students (University of North Georgia)

- ❑ **Participation period:** Mar. 10 - 17, 2019
- ❑ **Status at the time of participation:** University Student
- ❑ **Current Status:** Working Professional
- ❑ **Current affiliation:** University of North Georgia
- ❑ **Social Media:** [LinkedIn](#)

KAKEHASHI Memoir by Jannett

■ Memories from the program

I joined the KAKEHASHI program in early March of 2019 as a student from the University of North Georgia. I was studying Japanese at the time and wanted nothing more than to surround myself entirely in the culture! It was my first time ever taking an international flight and I felt like I was holding my breath all the way until I arrived. When we landed at Tokyo, we were greeted by JICE, and attended a lecture from a former American diplomat regarding their life in Japan. Afterwards, we took a tour of the city, and I remember witnessing the beauty of the Cherry Blossoms that were tightly wrapping their buds for later that month. Next we took our domestic flight to Saga and when arrived we traveled through the rolling hills of its peaceful landscape. During our first day in Saga, we took an in-depth history lesson from the local samurai museum, we immersed ourselves in a delicate tea ceremony, and we practiced graceful melodies on the traditional koto. I remember the next day being focused on meeting a crowd of energetic students from Saga University and meeting our lovely host mom for our homestay. Upon our return to Tokyo, I embraced the moment to take a walk along the city's coastline and peacefully reflect on all the beautiful memories.

■ Life after the program

It will soon be 7 years since I embarked on my journey on the KAKEHASHI Project, Japan's Friendship Ties Programs. Life since then has left me with unpredictable conformities, starting from the months after my return from KAKEHASHI and study abroad in Japan, these memories are with helped me push through difficulties during Covid-19. Over that time and after, I fulfilled my desire to focus on my personal growth and bring more peace into my life. I am grateful to be where I am now and am looking forward to seeing Japan again soon.

■ Message for the future

For every future KAKEHASHI participant, my best advice is to be present in that moment and not let others belittle the child like excitement from you. As someone who was not active with social media, I thought I didn't need to take any videos or pictures of myself but I honestly wish I took more. Please prepare well to take many pictures with yourself since you will already be taking many in groups.





Vanessa Reyes

Program for University Students (University of North Georgia)

- ❑ **Participation period:** Mar. 10 - 17, 2019
- ❑ **Status at the time of participation:** University Student
- ❑ **Current Status:** University Student
- ❑ **Current affiliation:** University of North Georgia (Gainesville)
- ❑ **Social Media:** [Instagram](#)

Building Bridges

■ Memories from the program

Back in 2019, I had the privilege to be sent with 20 other University of North Georgia students to visit Japan. As exciting as Tokyo was, my favorite part was my homestay in Saga. It was only two days out of our seven-day itinerary, but my host family made sure me and my two other classmates experienced as much Japanese culture as we could in that small amount of time. I remember picking strawberries in their greenhouse, pounding mochi in their backyard until finally all our hard work came together and we ended up in their kitchen rolling *ichigo daifuku*. Even after all these years, I can never forget the first bite. The trail of strawberry juice dripping down my chin and the soft chew of mochi in my mouth will forever be etched into my memory. Immediately after returning from the program, my classmates and I put together an event to share our experiences with the rest of the school. Some of us made onigiri at their homestay and showed the rest of us how to make a whole platter to serve our guests. We also served green tea and discussed some of the activities we took part in during our trip, such as the tea ceremony and cultural exchange at Saga University. From there we shared a slideshow and played games with our audience to share with them what we learned about Japanese culture.

■ Life after the program

Years after the program, I have been lucky enough to take part in some of KAKEHASHI Project's virtual workshops, such as the shibori and ikebana workshops. Seeing how dedicated the KAKEHASHI team was to keeping me connected to their mission, inspired me to step out of my own shell, and become more involved in the communities around me. I have since then joined the KAKEHASHI Alumni Committee that coordinates these workshops and have volunteered at Japanfest; a festival in Duluth, Georgia that promotes Japanese culture and local Japanese businesses.

■ Message for the future

For those of you about to take part in the KAKEHASHI Project, I would like to emphasize the importance of building connections during and after your trip. You will be surprised at who you meet. Many of my classmates and I have stayed in touch with other students we met at Saga University. Even after the trip, you will continue to meet amazing people through KAKEHASHI. It is a welcoming community that will continue to thrive as long as we continue to make connections.



My KAKEHASHI Stories

- Inbound Programs FY2019 -

- **Hafsa Hasna Kaouache**--- Program for Japanese Language Communication
- **Quinn Susuki** --- Program for Japanese American Youth (JAAC)



Hafsa Hasna Kaouache

Program for Japanese Language Communication

- ❑ **Participation period:** Jan. 08 - 15, 2020
- ❑ **Status at the time of participation:** University Student
- ❑ **Current Status:** Working Professional
- ❑ **Current affiliation:** Innodata
- ❑ **Social Media:** [LinkedIn](#)

"If There's a Will, There's a Bridge"

■ Memories from the program

I had always dreamed of going to Japan. Through the KAKEHASHI Project, that dream finally came true. Although the program lasted only a week, the schedule was so full and exciting that it felt both longer and shorter at the same time, an experience packed with discovery, laughter, and meaning. We began in Tokyo and later spent two unforgettable days in Yonezawa City. During our homestay there, we had the chance to see the *Dondoyaki* festival. The scenery I've seen that time was so beautiful and surreal that it remains one of the most magical moments of my life. Our homestay family was incredibly warm and kind too! They made us feel truly welcome and cared for, and we enjoyed every moment we spent together sharing meals, conversations, and laughter that I still remember fondly today. We also learned about the history of the Uesugi clan, and especially *Uesugi Harunori's* famous saying, “*為せば成る*” (“If there's a will, there's a way”). It felt like a happy coincidence as this has always been my personal motto, and hearing it celebrated in Yonezawa made the experience feel even more personal and fated. Throughout the week, we took part in many cultural activities and exchange sessions with local university students, where we've met various wonderful people each with different teachings and different stories to tell, and some of which have become dear friends who I'm still in touch with now even years later! KAKEHASHI Project didn't just fulfill a dream, it gave me friendships, values, and memories that continue to shape who I am.

■ Life after the program

After returning home, I wanted to continue building bridges between Japan and the world, which led me to become an Assistant Language Teacher through the JET Programme, where I spent the last three years working in elementary schools in Kobe City. During my time there, I made an effort to live up to the name “KAKEHASHI”—a bridge—by volunteering in community events, sharing my culture, and giving presentations about my home country even outside my school work hours. Each of these experiences was both meaningful and fun, reminding me of the same sense of exchange and connection I first felt during the KAKEHASHI Program. The program was more than just a cultural visit; it was the start of a lifelong journey to connect, learn, and grow. My memories of that time are still fond and will always be cherished.

■ Message for the future

KAKEHASHI Project is a truly wonderful opportunity to experience Japan in ways you never could as a tourist. I highly recommend it to anyone considering applying. In today's world, where understanding and empathy are more important than ever, valuable programs like KAKEHASHI Project help us build bridges across cultures and hearts. As someone who has always wanted to connect people and cultures, the word “KAKEHASHI” has become part of who I am. I will continue striving to be a bridge between Japan and my own roots, and I'll always be grateful for the experience that started it all.





Quinn Susuki

Program for Japanese American Youth (JACL)

- ❑ **Participation period:** Feb. 26 - Mar. 04, 2020
- ❑ **Status at the time of participation:** University Student
- ❑ **Current affiliation:** Oregon State University
- ❑ **Social Media:** [LinkedIn](#)

Go Japan

■ Memories from the program

Long ago I applied for the spring 2020 KAKEHASHI Project experience. I was 19, a Junior in college studying bioengineering. It was spring of 2020 and I was dabbing on the dancefloor, addicted to sandwiches, apathetic but ambitious. I was prepared for sushi, ramen, and anime references... I didn't know what a positive impact a pilgrimage to my ancestral homeland would have on me mentally and spiritually, but who would pass on a sponsored trip to Japan? Thank you JACL and JICE. I could not ask for a better place to learn hardworking and clean spirit. What a change in culture to be immersed in, I was so lucky to have my ragtag team of US citizens to explore with. Philosophers, artists, politicians, farmers I met so many beautiful souls I never would have without KAKEHASHI. I can't even begin to describe how good the food was. From sledding in the mountains of Kuji, to walking the streets of Shibuya, KAKEHASHI was unforgettable.

■ Life after the program

I felt a profound sense of harmony from the people working there. But then Covid-19 locked down any more world travel for a while. I lost touch with the JACL, my family. A rather lonely time I spent introspecting and questioning who I was back in the USA. I took internships in sales, teaching, firefighting, I had Relationships, sports, houses, cars, then a diploma. One year in Puerto Rico clears my mind then I finally returned to Japan just over 5 years after KAKEHASHI Project. Living there for 3 months was a great experience and I've found a love for the language and culture. I'll be back next month.

■ Message for the future

I highly recommend this program. The planning is excellent. Anyone would want to go back to Japan after a week of the KAKEHASHI experience. Being accepted for the program is like a \$10,000 scholarship. The best aspects of Japanese life are highlighted and shared in such a balanced manner: homestays, to hotels, many activities and still free time to explore, interactions with locals and other Japanese Americans, movement across Japan and just enough time to get familiar with small towns and city blocks. I hope this program continues and that other young people from rural towns have the chance to go to Japan. And that other mixed race youths can take this opportunity to get together and feel a sense of belonging.



My KAKEHASHI Stories

- Inbound Programs FY2022 -

- **Moshe Lencer**--- Program for Jewish Americans (B'nai B'rith International)
- **Lauren C Bell** --- Program for Inouye Program (Randolph-Macon College)
- **JoonTae Jimmy Han** --- Program for Canadian Young Leaders
- **Caleb Gilligan** --- Program for University Students (University of Ottawa)
- **Wiam Ettamli** --- Program for University Students (University of Ottawa)
- **Kyndal Aimerson** --- Program for Inouye Program (Northeastern State University)
- **Angel Bryant** --- Program for Inouye Program (Howard University)
- **Max Malmud**-- Program for Inouye Program (Hawaii Pacific University)
- **Thabiso Faith Mutumhe**-- Program for Inouye Program (Hawaii Pacific University)
- **Emily Jones**--- Program for High School Students (Lebanon HS & Helena HS)
- **Victoria Elkins Mohr**-- Program for High School Students (Lebanon HS & Helena HS)
- **Seng Hok Peng**-- Program for Asian American Students (APAICS)



Moshe Lencer

Program for Jewish Americans (B'nai B'rith International)

- ❑ **Participation period:** Nov. 10 - 17, 2022
- ❑ **Status at the time of participation:** Working Professional
- ❑ **Current Status:** Working Professional
- ❑ **Current affiliation:** American Jewish Committee
- ❑ **Social Media:** [Instagram](#), [LinkedIn](#)

Friendship Ties

■ Memories from the program

As a young Jew living in America, I was thrilled to have been accepted into the KAKEHASHI Project, which is sponsored by the Japanese government. I was even more excited to learn that the trip was part of a B'nai B'rith International mission. The fact that the trip was part of B'nai B'rith, an organization that promotes Jewish unity and combats antisemitism, made it all the more meaningful for me. I felt a sense of pride in representing my community and my heritage on a global stage. I was eager to learn more about Japan and to forge connections with people from around the world, all while promoting the values of tolerance and acceptance that are so important to B'nai B'rith. When I arrived in Tokyo with my group, I was impressed by the city's vibrancy and energy. We spent our first few days exploring the city's famous landmarks, including the Shibuya Crossing, the Tokyo Skytree (an observation deck), and the Meiji Shrine. I was struck by the juxtaposition of modern and traditional architecture, which gave the city a unique and compelling character. One of the trip's highlights for me was the opportunity to visit Hiroshima. As a history buff, I was eager to learn more about the city's tragic history as the target of the first atomic bomb. Walking through the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum was a profoundly moving experience that left a lasting impact on me.

Moreover, it reinforced the importance of promoting peace and understanding, which are values that B'nai B'rith International holds dear. Throughout the trip, I was moved by the kindness and hospitality of the Japanese people we met. Everyone was incredibly warm and welcoming, from the strangers who helped us navigate the city to the families who welcomed us into their homes for traditional meals and cultural experiences. As a result, I felt a sense of connection to the people and the culture I had never experienced before.

Overall, the KAKEHASHI Project was a life-changing experience for me. It gave me the opportunity to learn more about Japanese culture and history, while also promoting the values of tolerance and acceptance that are so important to B'nai B'rith. I returned home with a deeper understanding of the world around me and a renewed sense of pride in my Jewish heritage.

■ Message for the future

I wish to see a world where boundaries shift and we can explore and experience each other's differences with joy and curiosity.





Lauren C Bell

Program for Inouye Program (Randolph-Macon College)

- ❑ **Participation period:** Feb. 01 - 08, 2023
- ❑ **Status at the time of participation:** Working Professional
- ❑ **Current Status:** Working Professional
- ❑ **Current affiliation:** Randolph-Macon College
- ❑ **Social Media:** [LinkedIn](#)

The KAKEHASHI Project: A Life-Changing Experience

■ Memories from the program

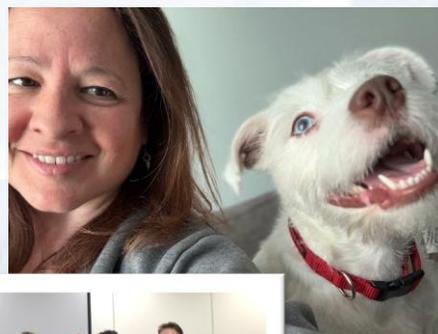
The KAKEHASHI Project was life-changing for the Randolph-Macon College (RMC) participants who traveled to Japan in February 2023, very soon after Japan began welcoming foreign travelers following the COVID-19 pandemic. RMC had originally been selected to participate in this important exchange program in the 2020 program year, but just days before our group was to depart for Japan, the global pandemic forced the original trip to be cancelled. RMC and Rikkyo University, in Tokyo, shifted some of our planned activities online, via Zoom, and the students formed meaningful connections, but these were no substitute for the relationships that bloomed when the students from both institutions were able to be together, in February 2023. For example, none of the students from either university wanted their visit to end on the day that the groups gathered at Rikkyo to play Japanese games! A few days later, the RMC students gained a new appreciation for the beauty and meaning of Japanese culture when they had the opportunity to be dressed in kimonos. The events and activities that the RMC students engaged in helped them to understand and appreciate the ways in which the traditional and the modern come together to create a contemporary Japanese culture that is both linked to the past and moving steadily and intentionally toward the future. RMC prioritized selecting students to participate in the KAKEHASHI Project who would not have been able to financially afford a trip to Japan on their own.

■ Life after the program

For many of the participants, it was their first time out of the United States; at least one had never been on an airplane before. The KAKEHASHI Project quite literally changed these young people's lives. One returned to Japan as a JET Program Participant and is now in his third year of service in that capacity. Several others have used the passports they acquired to engage in additional travel outside of the United States. All the participants follow news from Japan closely in ways they did not do before. RMC's link to Japan began in earnest when our alumna, Taylor Anderson, '08 perished in the March 11, 2011, triple disaster. Since 2011, RMC students have learned about Taylor and her desire to be a bridge between the U.S. and Japan. The KAKEHASHI Project helped to make Taylor's vision a reality for a new generation of RMC students.

■ Message for the future

Please keep this program going! The experiences that these young people had in Japan in 2023 made them realize how little they knew about the world and how much they wanted to explore beyond their home country. Each gained a new appreciation for the history and culture of Japan, and the opportunities that the KAKEHASHI Project afforded them helped to make them global citizens, not just citizens of the United States.



JoonTae Jimmy Han

Program for Canadian Young Leaders

- ❑ **Participation period:** Feb. 12 - 19, 2023
- ❑ **Status at the time of participation:** Working professional
- ❑ **Current Status:** Working Professional
- ❑ **Current affiliation:** MegaGen Canada Inc.
- ❑ **Social Media:** [Facebook](#)

■ Memories from the program

Memories of the KAKEHASHI Project: It was my great pleasure to visit Japan during the KAKEHASHI Project 2022–2023 Canadian Young Leaders Cohort. Japan had always been a country I admired and dreamed of visiting. Through this program, I reflected on the role I could play in strengthening ties between Japan and Canada. Experiencing Japan firsthand gave me many valuable insights. I was deeply touched by the kindness and warmth of the people, the country's rich history, advanced technology, unique and diverse culture, and beautiful and delicious cuisine. It was truly an inspiring and unforgettable journey that broadened my perspective on society, government, and the economy. As a business professional, it was an unforgettable experience to visit several local businesses like Shimano Bicycle (Sakai City), SAKAI DENSHOKAN (Sakai Traditional Crafts Museum), and to learn about the history, craftsmanship and also learn about the technology revolution at Chiba Institute of Technology (Tokyo Skytree Town Campus). It was also a unique and unforgettable experience to have a street interview by the TV Tokyo program "Why did you come to Japan?" at Harajuku Street. I've shared my story in public about the "KAKEHASHI Project" and how I came to Japan through the KAKEHASHI Project. It was the perfect opportunity to promote the KAKEHASHI Project and explain why this is so important. It was a very meaningful visit to Ms. YOSHIKAWA Yuumi, Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs, to learn more about Japanese Foreign Affairs policy and the future plan of Japan. I would like to

thank you sincerely once again to the Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada, Embassy of Japan in Canada, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan and JICE for making this great KAKEHASHI Project happen during the COVID-2022-2023.

■ Life after the program

About my current self: Since 2023, I've been working as a Dental Implant Consultant, providing a professional solution to Dentists and Dental clinics. I've also been working as a director of the Korean Cultural Heritage Society, which boosts Korean Traditional Culture and promotes multiculturalism among many ethnic communities in Metro Vancouver. I've participated in the Nikkei Matsuri Japanese cultural event, which was held in the Nikkei Centre this Summer in Vancouver and met the president of Nikkei Centre, Mr. ONO and discussed about future Multicultural exchange program for mutual understanding and collaboration through culture, food and people. I'm looking forward to our future project.

■ Message for the future

Welcome, KAKEHASHI Future Leaders! The door is wide open, uncap your potential, expand your boundary by participating, experiencing and learning a unique, but meaningful program in your life. This is a once-in-a-lifetime chance to participate, and it's worth it! Welcome everyone!





Caleb Gilligan

Program for University Students (University of Ottawa)

- ❑ **Participation period:** Feb. 19 - 26, 2023
- ❑ **Status at the time of participation:** University Student
- ❑ **Current Status:** Working Professional
- ❑ **Current affiliation:** University of Ottawa
- ❑ **Social Media:** [LinkedIn](#), [Instagram](#)

■ Memories from the program

Participating in the KAKEHASHI Project was undoubtedly one of the most influential experiences of my life. When an opportunity arose to visit Japan, I decided to apply for the program as I thought it would be a fun experience. The personal growth I experienced on the trip was far greater than what I expected, and the experience opened my eyes in ways I never imagined. One of the greatest impacts the KAKEHASHI Program had on my life was giving me the confidence to embark on new experiences, no matter how foreign or frightening they might be. The confidence and desire to explore new places, experience new cultures, and speak with people from different backgrounds is something I have kept with me and applied to other travels. The biggest thing that stood out to me was how well-organized the program was. From the moment we were accepted, JICE provided clear communication and instructions to help ease our nerves. Once we arrived, everything was planned, which allowed us to fully immerse ourselves in the activities without stressing about minor details. The supervisors and group leaders were kind and thoughtful, and we made connections that have continued to this day. The most memorable experience I had in Japan was our home visit with a family in Nagoya City. After touring Chukyo University, we travelled 45 minutes to the home of a student we were paired with. At her home, we spent the whole day with her family playing traditional Japanese games, learning how to write Kanji, and eating delicious homemade food (I will never forget how good the *Takoyaki* was). It was that day when I fell in love with Japan. While we could not speak each other's language, our conversations were meaningful and engaging, and her family was extremely happy to share their culture while learning about ours.

■ Life after the program

Since participating in KAKEHASHI Project in February 2023, I have made an effort to stay connected with Japan. Reading books on Japanese culture and diving deeper into Japan's history has given me a new appreciation for my experience with KAKEHASHI Project. Furthermore, the occasional "Origami Night" also allows me to stay connected with Japanese culture while sharing it with friends who have yet to experience it.

■ Message for the future

I fully recommend the KAKEHASHI Project for any students who are interested in new experiences. From start to finish, JICE does an excellent job of preparing you for the culture shock of visiting Japan while organizing a trip that you will remember for your whole life. Beyond the trip itself, participating in the KAKEHASHI Project will give you the confidence to take on any challenge while teaching you valuable lessons about travelling to new places in the future. I hope the KAKEHASHI project continues to foster important connections between Canada and Japan for years to come.





Wiam Ettamli

Program for University Students (University of Ottawa)

- **Participation period:** Feb. 19 - 26, 2023
- **Status at the time of participation:** University Student
- **Current affiliation:** École du Barreau du Québec
- **Social Media:** [Linkedin](#), [Instagram](#)

KAKEHASHI: Where Bonds Blossom

■ Memories from the program

The KAKEHASHI Project is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. When I received my selection to the 2023 delegation, I knew I was about to step into an unforgettable adventure, but it far surpassed what I had envisioned! On our first day in Tokyo, we were received at the Imperial Palace for a Courtesy visit with her Imperial Highness Princess Takamado. She shared with us her commitment to the conservation of birds and biodiversity, as an ambassador for nature and Honorary President of BirdLife International. Through photography, she captures wildlife and natural habitats, advocating for their protection. I was truly inspired by her creativity and benevolence. Experiencing Japan's breathtaking natural beauty in (almost) springtime was beyond words. The scenery felt dream-like, with Sakura trees in bloom, centuries-old shrines and temples surrounded by gardens and Mont-Fuji in all its majesty! The landscape feels like a sanctuary, inviting you to slow down, and fully absorb the moment. One of my most cherished memories in Japan was our traditional matcha tea ceremony at Yagoto-san Kōshō-ji Temple in Nagoya, guided by expert tea masters. It emphasized mindfulness through slow, deliberate movements, where every gesture, from whisking the tea to offering a cup, was performed with intention. Our Sensei invited us to reflect on the beauty of that shared moment, bringing together people from different walks of life. As I learned more about green tea itself and its benefits, drinking matcha gradually became a daily morning ritual for me upon returning home. Another highlight of our trip was being paired with host families. From the moment we arrived, we were warmly welcomed by Chukyo University students. They invited us into their everyday lives, sharing traditional meals, showing us their home and neighbourhood, driving us around town, and shopping together. Even without speaking the same language, we found ways to connect. We shared stories and pictures of our lives back home, our loved ones, our hobbies, and interests. In those simple exchanges, we turned from total strangers to friends by the end of the day.

Japanese culture is one of incredible hospitality and generosity, which we experienced throughout our whole stay. What I learned from this wonderful experience is the value of international exchange, dialogue, and diplomacy. Embracing our differences enriches our perspectives and broadens our world views. It pushed me to step beyond my comfort zone, and I came to the conclusion that growth often begins where familiarity ends.

■ Life after the program

I graduated with a Licentiate in Law (L.L.L) from the University of Ottawa, and I am currently in the middle of my licensing process to become a lawyer. I've been working as a legal intern in an asylum seeker/refugee law firm, which gives me the opportunity to connect with other cultures while contributing to the protection of fundamental rights on an international scale. Despite the demands of my academic pursuits and professional journey, my passion for cultural exchange remained a guiding force. Over the past years, I travelled to France, as well as Morocco, my country of origin. I also went on a grand tour of Italy and I hope a new destination is in the cards for me in the near future, as I continue to seek opportunities for discovery, connection, and learning across borders.

■ Message for the future

Say yes more! To new experiences, even when they feel uncertain. To opportunities, to people, and to the unknown. I almost could not make it to the KAKEHASHI trip because I was too worried about my midterm exams, but choosing to go turned out to be one of the best decisions I have ever made. I came back with not only many cherished memories, but also a renewed sense of energy and readiness to take on new challenges. The KAKEHASHI Project undoubtedly opened many doors for my personal and professional development, and placed me in many rooms filled with inspiring encounters, including ambassadors and government officials. Above all, it served as a bridge that brought people from all around the globe closer together. If this opportunity ever comes your way, don't let it pass you by!

PHOTOS





Kyndal Aimerson

Program for Inouye Program (Northeastern State University)

- ❑ **Participation period:** Feb. 22 - Mar. 01, 2023
- ❑ **Status at the time of participation:** University Student
- ❑ **Current Status:** University Student
- ❑ **Current affiliation:** Northeastern State University

Tribal Cultural Appreciation

■ Memories from the program

My favorite moments in the program were times when I could sit and really take in the area. We went to the Zojo-ji temple, I could hardly believe we were in Tokyo. The air was so quiet and serene. I stopped and wondered about the area, it was so lush and green even in the cold month. Everything was so interesting to me, I wanted to know about the little paper strips that you could purchase there. I wanted to know how they made the *omamori*, and what each item was used for. I believe deeply in spiritual practices, as a Keetoowah, our people also hold spiritual beliefs. A lot of things were similar with the Ainu peoples and my people, I had an amazing time at the Ainu museum and getting to talk with some of them not only as tour guides but as tribal members. We shared stories from the group and listened to theirs, the similarities were amazing to see. Things I felt I wouldn't have known, but thanks to the program, I was able to have this chance to learn.

■ Life after the program

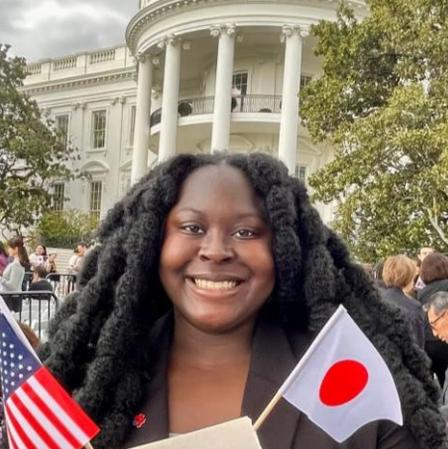
When I returned home, my parents asked me to go eat dinner with them. As soon as we walked in, I realized how loud it was here. Something I didn't notice then but "being quiet to not bother others" was a real culture difference I previously did not believe was real. I got to work on my basket, which was my action plan project. The basket represents my knowledge of my culture, I added an Ainu design on to represent the knowledge that I gained from them.

My appreciation for teaching culture and museum work only thrived after I returned. The Ainu Museum impacted my love for sharing culture, and I now work within my tribe's museum. Whenever I get the chance I tell the story of the Indigenous people of Japan, because of how much it gets lost in modern media. My tribe, the United Keetoowah Band, goes through that same process, and I hope to bring more awareness not only to our own people but to others. Cultural appreciation of our tribes brings healing to our people. It brings knowledge, support and understanding. This trip has impacted my life in so many ways, and I thank everyone deeply for creating this opportunity in my life. I hope to go back and continue learning.

■ Message for the future

For anyone who is considering this, I highly recommend doing it. I was very unsure about a lot of things before I decided to create my application with the school. I honestly did not think I would be accepted. I asked my family, and they encouraged me to apply. They always taught me that if I ever get a crazy awesome opportunity to do something, then I should take it. I was nervous, I was anxious, it was the longest flight I had ever been on, and I am so happy that I went. I think you should go!





Angel Bryant

Program for Inouye Program (Howard University)

- ❑ **Participation period:** Feb. 28 - Mar. 07, 2023
- ❑ **Status at the time of participation:** University Student
- ❑ **Current Status:** University Student
- ❑ **Current affiliation:** Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies
- ❑ **Social Media:** [LinkedIn](#)

Howard-Keiwa KAKEHASHI Story

■ Memories from the program

Although I have always been fascinated with Japanese culture, I didn't start studying Japanese until college. I never imagined I would be able to visit Japan until my college was chosen to participate in the KAKEHASHI-Inouye Scholars Program. My college, Howard University, in Washington, D.C. was paired with Keiwa College in Niigata Prefecture, Japan. We hosted Keiwa students in D.C. for one week before they hosted us in Niigata the following week. During their stay in Washington, D.C., some Keiwa students visited my apartment where I made Southern-style mac and cheese (a fan favorite!). We also showed them around campus and visited a nearby shopping district. During a debrief session on campus, we all exchanged gifts with our counterparts at Keiwa and got to hear about their first impressions of Washington, D.C. Before taking the shinkansen to Niigata, we spent time in Tokyo with our wonderful JICE representatives. They worked hard to ensure we saw everything we wanted: Asakusa, Tokyo Tower, Tokyo Skytree, Shibuya, and, of course, Akihabara. My favorite part of the program, however, was visiting our counterparts at Keiwa college. They prepared several cultural activities for us to do: *shodo* (calligraphy) *naginata*, and *shorinji kempo*. We also visited a strawberry farm, Kikusui sake brewery, an *ashi-yu*, Shimizu-en, and participated in a kimono experience in Murakami City, among many other wonderful experiences!

■ Life after the program

After completing the program, I was inspired to continue my journey as a bridge between the U.S. and Japan.

I participated in the U.S. Department of State's Critical Language Scholarship Program for Japanese language the following summer and studied abroad at Osaka Gakuin University the following fall semester. I also still talk to my KAKEHASHI friends from Keiwa. While studying abroad, I was able to meet a few of them in Niigata Prefecture. Earlier this year during the World Expo in Osaka, I met up with my friends from KAKEHASHI again and had a great time visiting the different country pavilions!

■ Message for the future

Participating in the KAKEHASHI Project opened a lot of doors for me. The month after KAKEHASHI, the then first lady of Japan, Mrs. Yuko Kishida, during her visit to Washington, D.C., stopped at Howard University to speak to fellow KAKEHASHI participants. Two of my peers and I were chosen to deliver a speech—in Japanese—to the first lady. A year later, during then Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's official visit to D.C., I was tapped by the Japanese embassy to give a speech on my KAKEHASHI experience alongside other Japanese and American students from the area. These experiences helped me secure an internship at the Japan-U.S. Friendship Commission, a government agency dedicated to U.S.-Japan diplomacy, and the Maureen and Mike Mansfield Foundation, a D.C.-based non-profit dedicated to promoting understanding between peoples of the U.S. and Asia. Professional development aside, I have also made lifelong friends from the KAKEHASHI Project who I still speak with to this day. The KAKEHASHI Project has positively impacted my life significantly. I would, without a doubt, participate again if given the chance.

PHOTOS





Max Malmud

Program for Inouye Program (Hawaii Pacific University)

- ❑ **Participation period:** Mar. 05 - 12, 2023
- ❑ **Status at the time of participation:** Working Professional
- ❑ **Current Status:** Working Professional
- ❑ **Current affiliation:** Pacific & Asian Affairs Council
- ❑ **Social Media:** [LinkedIn](#)

How the KAKEHASHI Project Shaped My Global Education Path

■ Memories from the program

In 2023, I had the honor of serving as the chaperone for the TOMODACHI KAKEHASHI-Inouye Scholars Program, accompanying a group of Hawai'i Pacific University students on an unforgettable study abroad experience in Japan. Our journey was filled with memorable moments, visiting historic temples, participating in traditional art workshops, immersing ourselves in Japanese culture through hands-on activities, and, of course, enjoying countless delicious meals together! Beyond the sights and flavors, what stood out most to me was witnessing the personal growth of the students I was supervising. Seeing them gain confidence, curiosity, and a deeper appreciation for cultural exchange made the experience profoundly rewarding, and it reminded me of the transformative power of international education.

■ Life after the program

This sparked a new sense of belonging in me as well, having a deeper understanding of my own cross-cultural background as a mixed-race Japanese, Jewish individual, and a more confident sense of my role as a Global citizen. Since returning from Japan, I've continued to stay in touch with the students I chaperoned, many of whom have now become close friends and professional collaborators. For me personally, the experience was a defining moment as it opened the door to new chapters in my career. It is thanks to my experience with KAKEHASHI Project and the networks I made through the program that I now serve as the inaugural Hawai'i Regional Representative for the TOMODACHI Initiative, and also serve as the Academic and Community Programs Director for the Pacific and Asian Affairs Council, a local nonprofit dedicated to providing global education and cultural exchange for Pacific youth.

In fact, four of the students from our KAKEHASHI Project group have since joined me as Core Committee members in my Regional Representative role, helping me to organize events and activities for TOMODACHI alumni throughout Hawai'i. We even hosted a mini-KAKEHASHI reunion where we reunited eight of our KAKEHASHI 2023 travel members with other TOMODACHI program alumni for a fun night of bowling and reminiscing about our time abroad. More recently, our Hawai'i team had the privilege of attending the 2025 U.S.–Japan Council Annual Conference in Waikiki, where we deepened our understanding of U.S.–Japan relations and grew professionally together through various workshops and networking events. This shared journey from participants to community leaders and young professionals reflects the lasting impact of the program and its connections, both of which I truly cherish.

■ Message for the future

For future participants, I hope you approach the experience with open minds and open hearts. It is truly a privilege to take part in a program that offers such deep cultural immersion, especially one that is built upon the shared values of respect, curiosity, and cooperation between Japan and the United States. Opportunities like KAKEHASHI are rare and transformative; they allow us to see the world, and ourselves, through a broader lens. I encourage every participant to embrace every challenge, savor every connection, and carry forward the spirit of exchange long after the program ends. By doing so, you help strengthen not only the bridge between Japan and Hawai'i, but also the shared future of our global community.





Thabiso Faith Mutumhe

Program for Inouye Program (Hawaii Pacific University)

- ❑ **Participation period:** Mar. 05 - 12, 2023
- ❑ **Status at the time of participation:** University Student
- ❑ **Current Status:** University Student
- ❑ **Current affiliation:** American University Washington College of Law
- ❑ **Social Media:** [LinkedIn](#)

Bridges That Endure

■ Memories from the program

The most meaningful part of the KAKEHASHI Project for me was the people. From the moment our delegation from Hawai'i Pacific University arrived in Tokyo, we shared a sense of curiosity and connection that transcended borders. We spent our days exploring Japan's vibrant culture and institutions—visiting the National Diet, meeting university students, and learning about the deep historical and diplomatic ties between Japan and the United States. Yet what I remember most are the friendships that grew from simple conversations on the bus, reflections during group dinners, and the mutual respect that developed among everyone we met.

■ Life after the program

Those bonds have endured long after the trip. Many of us have stayed in contact, celebrating milestones, exchanging career updates, and supporting each other's goals. KAKEHASHI was more than a cultural exchange; it was the beginning of a lifelong network of globally minded peers who continue to inspire me. The experience also reinforced my desire to work in fields that bridge cultures and advance international cooperation. After returning home, I completed dual bachelor's degrees in International Studies and Diplomacy & Military Studies at Hawai'i Pacific University, where I deepened my focus on the Indo-Pacific region through research fellowships on maritime security and economic policy. Today, as a J.D./M.A. candidate in law and international affairs in Washington, D.C., I continue to build on the spirit of KAKEHASHI.

My work has taken me from the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission's Office of International Affairs to the World Trade Organization in Geneva, where I studied global trade governance and cooperation. At every stage, I have carried with me the lessons of empathy, dialogue, and bridge-building that KAKEHASHI Project instilled.

■ Message for the future

To future KAKEHASHI Project participants: embrace every conversation and moment of discovery. The program will shape how you see the world and your role within it. Let curiosity guide you and kindness connect you—the bridges you build through KAKEHASHI Project will last a lifetime.





Emily Jones

Program for High School Students (Lebanon HS & Helena HS)

- ❑ **Participation period:** Mar. 05 - 12, 2023
- ❑ **Status at the time of participation:** High School Student
- ❑ **Current Status:** University Student
- ❑ **Current affiliation:** Middle Tennessee State University
- ❑ **Social Media:** [LinkedIn](#)

Appreciation for Art and Physical Media

■ Memories from the program

I remember sitting in the L Stay and Grow hotel the first night with a few members in my group, some children's program I didn't recognize blaring on the television as we tried to nurse ourselves from the jet lag. We walked to the Seven-Eleven across the street and bought snacks, and I remember biting into a salmon *Onigiri* roll and thinking, "This was the dream, wasn't it?" It was, at the time. I remember when my junior class first got the announcement that we had a chance to go. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we were delayed, people gave up, except me, then a freshman in college, now with a set of youngsters to look after and be an example for while on the trip. In addition to this, I was conducting a sociology project comparing and contrasting American culture versus Japanese culture. With no signal, I was left with hanging onto tangible media, and taking photos. This was much easier than I thought it would be, given that physical media in the states has become more obsolete. I remember grabbing two of the brochures from the Akasaka Palace, one in English, one in Japanese, treating them like gold, along with a brooch. Another one I still have is a bag of green tea I received with my host family at a tea house. It's still fragrant. I also have almost 300 photos from the trip, some of which I posted online right after.

■ Life after the program

Today, I find myself being less online than before, more of an observer of what's going on around the world and studying how others spend their time. I enjoy taking photos of environments quite often, using them frequently in class projects, and I've even posted a few online. I've also made a shadowbox dedicated to the trip, full of papers and items I acquired during the trip (such as magazines, fortunes, cards, and more!) I want to preserve these memories, much like how I want to preserve physical media for others to enjoy in my career as a future librarian!

■ Message for the future

My advice for future participants: turn your phone off. Focus on what is in front of you and the people around you. Japan is still very in touch with the tangible, even with it being big in the technology space. You'll be surprised what you can find and experience by connecting without social media as a factor. If you find something intangible you'd like to hold onto, take a picture of it. Take a small notebook with you for thoughts you have during the commutes to and from places. You'll be thankful later!





Victoria Elkins Mohr

Program for High School Students (Lebanon HS & Helena HS)

- **Participation period:** Mar. 05 - 12, 2023
- **Status at the time of participation:** Working Professional
- **Current Status:** Working Professional
- **Current affiliation:** Lebanon High School

Lebanon High School, Lebanon, TN Alumni

■ Memories from the program

Our trip to Japan and the chance to become KAKEHASHI Alumni was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for all of us in many different ways. Most of my students had never been out of the country and some had never been out of the state of Tennessee. For me, I was coming home, in a sense. I spent over three years in Tokyo while in elementary school. Returning was a dream come true. Although years had passed, it was still the Japan I remembered. Our time in Tokyo and Shizuoka was incredible with trips to shrines, the sky tower, imperial palace grounds, Mt. Fuji museum, and a special meeting with the Deputy Mayor of Shizuoka. We spent hours at a hosting Japanese high school and with a homestay family. One of my students made friends with a Japanese high school peer and they have continued to email.

■ Life after the program

After returning from the trip, my students gave a presentation for the Nashville Sakura Festival Week featuring our experience and pictures taken by students. I was the first high school teacher in the state of Tennessee to be endorsed in Japanese. I became the first to teach Japanese in middle Tennessee and enjoyed it for 10 years. Two years after our KAKEHASHI trip, I retired after 24 years of teaching. I have since moved to North Carolina to be closer to my seven children and grandchildren. I now enjoy online language exchange and teaching English to Japanese adults.

■ Message for the future

I applaud the KAKEHASHI Project for awarding high school and college students such a rich opportunity. Such generous travel opportunities are unheard of for students of other languages, especially in high school. Our group was a little special. We were chosen right before Covid-19 hit and travel became impossible. There were many months that we all thought our KAKEHASHI dream was just that, a dissolving dream. However, reality happened and before we could pinch ourselves, it was over. My high school students are now entering or in college. I hope they continue their pursuit of Japanese and study abroad.





Seng Hok Peng

Program for Asian American Students (APAICS)

- ❑ **Participation period:** Mar. 14 - 21, 2023
- ❑ **Status at the time of participation:** University Student
- ❑ **Current Status:** Working Professional
- ❑ **Current affiliation:** Manatt, Phelps & Phillips LLP
- ❑ **Social Media:** [LinkedIn](#)

■ Memories from the program

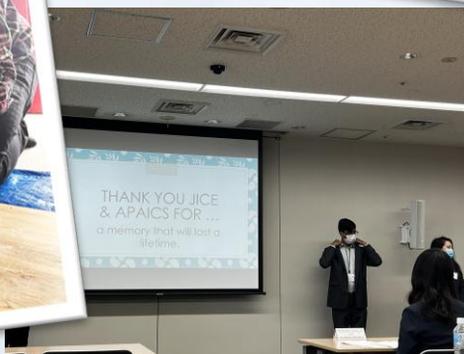
The highlight of my time as a KAKEHASHI Project participant was undoubtedly the home visit. The warmth and hospitality I experienced during this visit were beyond words. One of the most memorable moments was making *udon* from scratch with my host family. It was a delightful experience, filled with laughter, learning, and of course, delicious food! The process of kneading the dough, cutting it into perfect strips, and finally tasting the homemade *udon* was truly special. In addition to the home visit, I had the opportunity to explore some of Japan's most iconic landmarks. Sightseeing in Tokyo was a dream come true. The bustling streets, the serene gardens, and the majestic Tokyo Tower left me in awe. One of the most serene experiences was visiting the royal palace grounds. Walking through the beautifully maintained gardens and witnessing the historical architecture was a humbling experience that deepened my appreciation for Japan's rich cultural heritage. Another significant aspect of the program was the interaction with university students. We had several exchange sessions where we shared our experiences, discussed our cultures, and built lasting friendships. These interactions were not only enriching but also broadened my perspective and understanding of global cultures. It was inspiring to see the enthusiasm and passion of the Japanese students and to share my own experiences with them.

■ Life after the program

The KAKEHASHI Project has had a profound impact on my life. It has not only provided me with unforgettable memories but also equipped me with valuable insights and skills. The experiences I gained during the program continue to influence my personal and professional life. I am grateful for the opportunity to have been a part of this amazing journey.

■ Message for the future

It is important more than ever to build bridges, embrace cultural differences, and collaborate to make the world a better place for everyone.



My KAKEHASHI Stories

- Inbound Programs FY2023-

- **Miranda Uribe Naves**--- Program for Winners of Japan Bowl (Canada)
- **Madison Ginn**--- Program for High School Students (Coretta Scott King Young Women's Leadership Academy)
- **Elisabeth Carrie Krebs** --- Program for Jewish Americans (B'nai B'rith International)
- **Morgan Mattler** --- Program for Jewish Americans (B'nai B'rith International)
- **Wayne Liao** --- Program for High School Students (Davis Senior High School)
- **Abigail Ann Chaffin** --- Program for High School Students (Hayfield Secondary School)
- **Janiel G. Cirino Echavarría** --- Program for Students University Students (University of Puerto Rico)
- **Joyzette Milene Pérez** --- Program for Students University Students (University of Puerto Rico)
- **Juan Carlos Velez Reyes**--- Program for Students University Students (University of Puerto Rico)
- **Alicia Maia Chang** --- Program for Japanese American Youth (JAACL)
- **Skylar Yebin Kim**--- Program for the Winners of Japanese Speech Contest
- **Vandhana Kammampati** --- Program for Japanese Language Communication
- **Katelyn Mo** ---Program for University Students (University of Waterloo)



Miranda Uribe Naves

Program for Winners of Japan Bowl (Canada)

- ❑ **Participation period:** Aug. 24 - 31, 2023
- ❑ **Status at the time of participation:** University Student
- ❑ **Current Status:** University Student
- ❑ **Current affiliation:** University of Toronto
- ❑ **Social Media:** [LinkedIn](#)

一期一会

■ Memories from the program

My name is Miri, and the KAKEHASHI Project Visiting Japan Program in 2023 and the KAKEHASHI Study Program in 2024 have been pivotal experiences shaping my academic and personal life. In the summer of 2023, freshly graduated from high school at 18, I joined the KAKEHASHI cohort from Vancouver and Ontario for an unforgettable week in Japan. Having dreamed of visiting Japan, the initial days were chaotic yet intensely joyful. My first day in Tokyo felt surreal, immediately leading me to meet two incredible people who are now cherished friends. Though my first trip was limited to the grandeur of Tokyo, it left me hungry for more. A visit to a Taiko Museum in Asakusa was a particular highlight; I was completely captivated by the meticulous making process of *Wadaiko* drums, followed by an energizing hands-on class. I also deeply value the opportunity to have participated in courtesy calls with dignitaries, including MOFA, Mrs. KISHIDA Yuko, and Her Imperial Highness Princess Takamado. These impactful conversations and the welcoming standard set by the program inspired me profoundly.

■ Life after the program

The KAKEHASHI experience directly influenced my first year at the University of Toronto. Determined to live up to the "KAKEHASHI Standard," I initially focused on East Asian Studies. By my second semester, my passion crystallized into a double major in East Asian Studies and Political Science, focusing specifically on cultural and social affairs within foreign policy. In parallel with my studies, I joined the University of Toronto Japan Association. As a first-year student, I looked up to the upper-year members who had built an inclusive community connecting Canadian students with Japan's rich culture. This club helped me form wonderful bonds and meet my closest friends. My connection to KAKEHASHI Project continued in the fall of 2024 when I was invited to the KAKEHASHI Study Program. This two-day program focused on renewable energy and environmental care, featuring visits to the Leaf Factory Tokyo and the Tokyo Hydrogen Museum. This second trip allowed me to travel more and discover Japan's absolute potential in depth. I carry all these memories with me. I am working hard to keep being a bridge—a true KAKEHASHI—between our cultures. No matter how challenging the process might be, I know the sun will shine on this path.

■ Message for the future

I don't know what the future holds, but I do know that I am facing it bravely and determined. I've discovered that life won't always go as I hoped, but there is always another opportunity or route towards a goal. My hope for the future is to be able to keep bridging my passion and appreciation for Japan and Canada with the world through political, social and cultural approaches. My hope for the future is for alumni like myself (and including myself) to keep putting ourselves out there, to keep trying, to appreciate everything and to never give up, no matter how hard or difficult it gets.





Madison Ginn

Program for High School Students

(Coretta Scott King Young Women's Leadership Academy)

- ❑ **Participation period:** Oct. 10 - 17, 2023
- ❑ **Status at the time of participation:** High School Student
- ❑ **Current Status:** High School Student
- ❑ **Current affiliation:** Coretta Scott King Young Women's Leadership Academy

To Exploring the Wonders of Japan

■ Memories from the program

How often do you get to travel across the world to explore a culture you've been longing to discover? My name is Madison Ginn and I have always been interested in Japanese anime and overall culture. I took Japanese for 3 years at Coretta Scott King Young Women's Leadership Academy, learning more and more about the Japanese language, culture, and more. Two years ago, I took the opportunity to participate in the KAKEHASHI Project. I was thrilled to see what this trip would bring and I couldn't be more happy to share my experience! My story began when I saw the famous Mount Fuji from my plane seat. That's when I knew this trip would be full of many great things! When my classmates and I arrived the sun had already started to set. On the second day after arrival, we visited the Sensoji temple located in Tokyo. There we performed the purifying cleansing at the fountain. After this we explored the rest of the temple and got fortune papers which are very popular in Japanese culture. After this experience we visited the Sky Tree tower, Chiba Institute of Technology, Tokyo Disney Resort and more. The next day we left for the city of Fukuoka where we participated in the school exchange at Fukuoka High school and home stay. It was all an amazing experience that I will never forget!

■ Life after the program

Thanks to the KAKEHASHI Project I was able to learn about Japanese culture by getting a first hand experience in Japan. While in the program I was able to make great connections with my homestay family and some students at Fukuoka High school. I learned much more about the history in Nagasaki and Hiroshima and gained a deeper appreciation for Japan's history and traditions! Because of this amazing opportunity I hope to continue to grow and maintain my connection with Japan.

■ Message for the future

Hello! For those wanting to participate in the KAKEHASHI Project, I wish you well on your journey to exploring the history and wonders of Japan. May you make many great connections like I did and enjoy them to the fullest.





Elisabeth Carrie Krebs

Program for Jewish Americans (B'nai B'rith International)

- ❑ **Participation period:** Oct. 31 - Nov. 07, 2023
- ❑ **Status at the time of participation:** Working Professional
- ❑ **Current Status:** Working Professional
- ❑ **Current affiliation:** B'nai B'rith International
- ❑ **Social Media:** [LinkedIn](#)

KAKEHASHI Project for B'nai B'rith Connect Young Professionals

■ Memories from the program

Participating in the KAKEHASHI Project as a staff member with B'nai B'rith International/Connect has been a deeply meaningful professional and personal experience. Each visit to Japan has provided opportunities for cultural exchange, including courtesy visits to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan and meetings with ambassadors from the Israeli and American embassies.

The professionalism and warmth of the JICE staff have been exceptional throughout, shaping both the success of the program and my own perspective on Japan and its people.

Beyond the formal itinerary, Japan's everyday hospitality stands out. Whether in a shopping center, an official setting, or simply asking for directions, there is a consistent spirit of courtesy and generosity. The KAKEHASHI Project offers a level of immersion difficult to replicate independently—through hands-on experiences like calligraphy in Hiroshima and silkscreen printing in Kobe, as well as meaningful interactions with local families and visits to shrines.

Japan's culinary diversity was another highlight. From Kyoto and Kobe to Hiroshima, Fukuyama, and Tokyo, each region offered distinct flavors and traditions, revealing a food culture far broader than the common perception of sushi.

Several experiences were particularly impactful. Visiting the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake Memorial Disaster Reduction and Human Renovation Institution provided valuable insight into resilience and recovery, aligning closely with B'nai B'rith International's mission. Sharing a

Shabbat dinner at Chabad of Kobe and in Tokyo with Jewish visitors from all over the world was quite meaningful.

The Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum offered a profound reflection on history, resilience, and peace. Equally moving was the Holocaust Museum in Fukuyama, where exhibits on the Holocaust, Anne Frank, and Chiune Sugihara, along with a heartfelt choir performance of Israeli songs, created a deeply emotional experience.

Together, these moments underscore the lasting value of cultural exchange—deepening understanding, strengthening connections, and reinforcing a shared commitment to global engagement.

■ Message for the future

It is encouraging to see more Americans recognizing Japan as a must-visit destination, despite the distance from the East Coast. These journeys offer more than travel—they broaden perspective.

Experiencing Japan's values of respect, mindfulness, and community encourages reflection and fosters deeper cross-cultural understanding, especially at a time when such awareness is increasingly important.

Programs like the KAKEHASHI Project play a vital role in building these connections. B'nai B'rith International is deeply grateful to JICE and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan for providing participants with an experience that goes far beyond a typical visit—one that leaves a lasting and meaningful impact.





Morgan Mattler

Program for Jewish Americans (B'nai B'rith International)

- ❑ **Participation period:** Oct. 31 - Nov. 07, 2023
- ❑ **Status at the time of participation:** Working Professional
- ❑ **Current Status:** Working Professional
- ❑ **Current affiliation:** U.S. Chamber of Commerce

■ Memories from the program

In early 2024 I spent eight unforgettable days in Japan as part of the KAKEHASHI Project, a diplomatic and cultural exchange coordinated by B'nai B'rith International and the Japan International Cooperation Center (JICE). From the moment our group arrived in Tokyo, I felt both welcomed and challenged to see the world through a different lens. We wandered through the lantern-lit grounds of Sensō-ji Temple, looked out over the city from Tokyo Tower, and ferried to the quiet beauty of Miyajima Island. The program gave us rare opportunities for dialogue, too. Meeting with Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs Kiyoto Tsuji and visiting the Israeli Embassy opened my eyes to how Japan views U.S.–Israel relations and the broader Middle East. The most moving experiences were those rooted in memory: walking through the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, and visiting the Holocaust Education Center in Fukuyama founded by my new friend Makoto Otsuko. Those conversations and sites reminded me that history is not distant—it's a guide to the choices we make today.

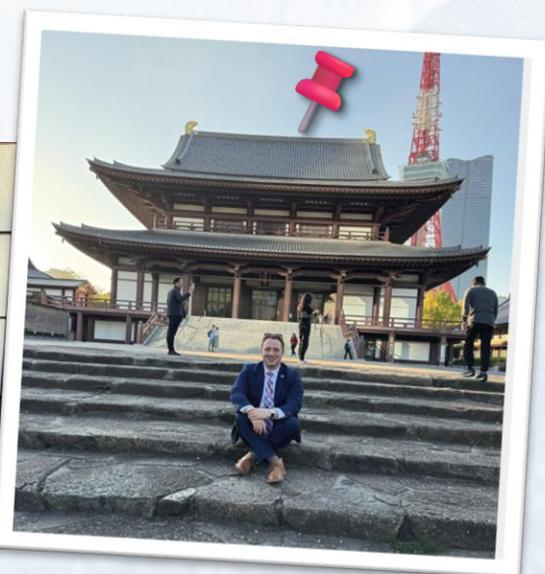
■ Life after the program

Coming home, I found that the KAKEHASHI Project didn't end when my plane touched down. Experiencing Japan through the KAKEHASHI Project developed a deep love and respect for the Japanese people, and my involvement with the Japanese community in DC deepened that connection and gave it a lasting purpose. Today I work at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce in Washington, D.C., and help companies navigate policy issues and build relationships

across cultures, and the lessons from Japan—listening first, finding common ground, respecting traditions while looking forward—shape how I approach that work every day. I've sought ways to stay involved with Japan right here in D.C., regularly attending events at the Embassy of Japan and the Japan Information & Culture Center. Those programs keep me engaged with Japanese art, language, and diplomacy while giving me a chance to share what I learned with others. I remain close with members of my KAKEHASHI Project cohort, and I will always be grateful for the opportunity to firsthand experience Japan and be an ambassador for it here in the States.

■ Message for the future

To anyone considering the KAKEHASHI Project or another international exchange, my advice is simple: go. The program is less about sightseeing and more about bridge-building—the very meaning of “kakehashi”. You'll be surprised by how quickly meals and conversations can erase the distance between countries. For future projects, I hope to see even more collaboration among alumni so that the connections we make abroad continue to grow at home. Exchanges like the KAKEHASHI Project prove that diplomacy isn't just for diplomats; it starts with individuals. I'm grateful to have crossed this bridge and excited to help others take their first steps.





Wayne Liao

Program for High School Students (Davis Senior High School)

- Participation period: Nov. 21 - 28, 2023
- Status at the time of participation: High School Student
- Current Status: University Student
- Current affiliation: University of California, Davis
- Social Media: [LinkedIn](#)

いい日旅立ち

■ KAKEHASHIでの思い出

最初に「カケハシ・プロジェクト」のことを聞いたとき、本当に意外だった。当時は日本語を勉強し始めて二年目、高校二年の前半だった。行き先が、訪れたことがない沖縄と東京だと知った際、私は甚だしく興奮したことを今でも鮮明に記憶している。

沖縄では、さまざまな体験をさせていただいた。空手の指導を受けたり、海やサンゴの環境について学んだり、地元の学生と交流したりした。その上、優しく接して下さったホストファミリーからエイサーの衣装や三線、そして琉球の歴史について教えていただいた。ホストファミリーが作った沖縄そばの味も、今でも食べたい程美味しかった。

東京で過ごした数日も同様に充実していた。ロボット技術や宇宙物理学、そしてほかの先端技術を見学することができ、幾度も目を開かされた。現在私が大学で工学を専攻しているのも、当時見た科学技術にある程度影響を受けたのだろう。

そして、一週間が嵐のように瞬く間に過ぎ去った。しかし、私にとってはかけがえのない期間となった。カケハシ・プロジェクトを通じて、私は日本文化との距離が縮まったと感じ、日本のことを更に知りたいという意欲も高まった。

■ 参加後の活動や近況

帰国してからも、日本との繋がりは途切れなく続いている。カケハシ・プロジェクトを通して深まった日本文化への熱意を携え、私は高校の日本文化部を引き継ぎ、

日本文化を周囲の人々に紹介した。同時に、私は日本語学習を更に進め、日本語能力試験N2に合格した。

そして現在、カケハシ・プロジェクト以来二年以上の時間が過ぎた。季節が幾度も変わり、高校という節目も終点に辿り着きりをむかえ、いざ私は大学へ旅立った。大学で専攻である材料工学に挑みながら日本語の学習も継続している。更に、日本へ留学する希望を現実に変えるため、大学の留学プログラムにも応募している。いずれ訪れる将来に、私は材料工学の知識を半導体関連の分野に活かしたい。日本、アメリカ、台湾など、半導体技術の最前線に立つ国々の研究者と力を合わせ、より革新的な技術をこの世にもたらすことが、私の今の目標である。

■ 未来へのメッセージ

新たな国を探索するチャンス、異なる文化を学ぶ好機、友人たちと絆を深める機会。そしてなにより、日本語学習の努力の報いとして、カケハシ・プロジェクトは私にとって多くの意味を持つ経験だ。もしこれを読んでいるあなたがカケハシ・プロジェクトに参加する機会があったら、自分自身の「意味」を見つけてください。そうすれば、きっと、悔いのない、心地よく振り返れる「架け橋」となるだろう。





Abigail Ann Chaffin

Program for High School Students (Hayfield Secondary School)

- ❑ **Participation period:** Nov. 28 - Dec. 05, 2023
- ❑ **Status at the time of participation:** High School Student
- ❑ **Current Status:** University Student
- ❑ **Current affiliation:** Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
- ❑ **Social Media:** [Instagram](#), [LinkedIn](#)

The Most Memorable Week of My Life

■ Memories from the program

I was initially thrilled to visit Japan for the second time in a calendar year for the KAKEHASHI Project. I had already been to Japan for a two-week vacation, but traveling for a more educational and professional purpose was something I'd yet to complete. Since I began learning Japanese, I knew that I wanted to study and/or work abroad, particularly in Japan, so experiencing the culture firsthand while working through our action plan and other assignments let me gauge how that would be if I were to follow through with my goals.

My fondest memories of the KAKEHASHI Project are the late-night trips to the *konbini* for some ice cream or karaoke booths to relieve any stress we had from our home life or schoolwork. My group of nine students collectively agreed that we would make the absolute most of our time in Japan, even if it meant waking up with puffy eyes and a craving for coffee. During our free time, we tried to find the most unique journeys to take ourselves on, including visiting a ferret and meerkat cafe on Takeshita street in Harajuku.

Our sheer ambition and adrenaline were something I try to emulate in my daily life. Because of the KAKEHASHI Project, I've developed the desire to make each day one to remember. I cherish that youthfulness and drive with each step I take throughout my newfound adulthood.

■ Life after the program

Since the KAKEHASHI Project, I've gone on to take an AP-level Japanese course, which accelerated my learning significantly and is arguably one of the most beneficial classes for me throughout high school.

With the continuous support of my teacher and friends, I was able to pass my exam and earn academic credit to

enroll in a 3rd year level Japanese class in my first semester of college at Virginia Tech. Since beginning my life as a college student, I've found various clubs, such as the Extensive Reading Club (多読の会) and the Conversation Club (会話の会), that have helped me immerse Japanese into my life in a region as unique as Southwest Virginia.

Despite having a busy schedule this fall semester, I'm already thinking of where my knowledge can take me in the future. I still have a strong desire to study abroad, either for a semester or a year in Japan, which Virginia Tech happens to offer. I'm more than thrilled to see what opportunities the Japanese language and culture will eventually present to me, and since my experience with the KAKEHASHI Project was so unforgettable, I'll accept anything with open arms in hopes of making even more wonderful memories!

■ Message for the future

I'm so elated to know that other students will be granted the same great opportunities that I received through the KAKEHASHI Project. International relations and politics in general can be a distressing and even discouraging field, but the actions of cultural appreciation, exchange and assimilation will aid in providing some sense of peace and reassurance for the future generations. Young adults are more capable of change than ever before due to globalization and technological advancements, so I sincerely hope that the incoming groups of exchange participants will use it to their advantage in order to facilitate a more peaceful and understanding world.

Compassion and curiosity are what the world needs right now, so I hope that future KAKEHASHI Project participants can use their experience to achieve open-mindedness and the understanding that the world can be beautiful, you just have to keep spreading good.

PHOTOS





Janiel G. Cirino Echavarría

Program for University Students (University of Puerto Rico)

- **Participation period:** Dec. 19 - 26, 2023
- **Status at the time of participation:** University Student
- **Current Status:** University Student
- **Current affiliation:** University of Puerto Rico (Rio Piedras Campus)

■ Memories from the program

The whole experience is something I will always remember. From our arrival in Tokyo to our trip through Shizuoka, it's not easy to forget a single moment. Every day brought something new and worth seeing. Our visit to the Meiji Shrine felt especially magical—a slice of history beautifully preserved and presented for everyone to experience. Among all the places we visited and activities we did, my time in Shizuoka was the most memorable. I learned about the history of tea ceremonies, information about Mt. Fuji, and the significance of certain architectural designs in ancient housing.

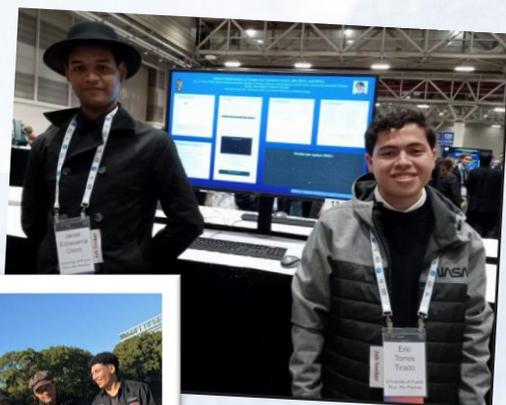
During our stay, we were separated into host families, and each of us participated in different activities. My friend and I stayed with the same host and explored the city with our guide. The above-ground streets were bright, lively, and full of decorations and performers, while the underground tunnels felt almost maze-like, requiring careful navigation to reach our destination. Simply walking through the city like that was one of the most fun experiences I've ever had. The next day, we visited a smaller shrine that also housed a graveyard. Its atmosphere was completely different from what we have at home—calm, respectful, and serene. I will never forget the kind people who guided us and taught us, whether our assigned guides or host families, who all provided a warm and welcoming environment.

■ Life after the program

After returning home, the 2023 KAKEHASHI Project participants, including myself, took part in many outreach events and activities on and off campus. We presented our experiences at our campus' Asian Culture Festival, hosted Japanese Culture Club events, and were invited to speak at a high school's Japan Festival. Personally, I continue to pursue my education and professional growth as a university student and a research student under the NASA Puerto Rico Space Grant Consortium Fellowship. I have participated in research projects and internships to prepare for my future career. I have never stopped thinking about my time in Japan, and I hope to return one day, either to continue higher education or engage in professional research.

■ Message for the future

All I can say is if your university is selected to participate, and there is a selection criterion like an essay to determine the best candidates, take your chance and submit it. Despite how you may think of yourself, how much your thoughts may betray you, every shot not taken is a shot missed. Speaking from experience, I had no expectation of being selected as a candidate in 2023, but I still gave it a chance and wrote an essay to submit. Be brave, you have what it takes to be part of the KAKEHASHI Project participants in your year.





Joyzette Milene Pérez

Program for University Students (University of Puerto Rico)

- ❑ **Participation period:** Dec. 19 - 26, 2023
- ❑ **Status at the time of participation:** University Student
- ❑ **Current Status:** University Student
- ❑ **Current affiliation:** University of Puerto Rico (Rio Piedras Campus)
- ❑ **Social Media:** [Instagram](#)

■ Memories from the program

Thanks to JICE and the KAKEHASHI Project, I was able to make a wish come true. Being able to see Japan, not only as a tourist but also as a learning experience. As someone who has always loved to learn more about the culture, myths and crafts from other ethnicities, this program gave me all that and more! During our trip, we did and saw a lot of Japan's traditions.

In Tokyo, we visited a museum dedicated to the Edo Period. They rebuilt houses and structures with the same tools and materials from the time period and even tried to find genuine items from then; if they couldn't find them, they would just make them! We've never seen anything like it! After our time in Japan, we took a trip via the Bullet Train. It was such a smooth ride, and we got to our destination fairly fast.

When we arrived in Shizuoka, we went to a tea museum and experienced a traditional tea ceremony. We also went to arts and crafts activities to do traditional blue dyeing. Another museum we visited was the Mt. Fuji World Heritage Center, where we learned about the history and nature of Mt. Fuji while being able to behold its glorious presence. What a gift to see Mt. Fuji in person! During our stay in Shizuoka we even visited a local university to talk with people our age! We also experienced what it's like to stay with a host family. Truly, the KAKEHASHI Project gave us a unique and wonderful experience!

■ Life after the program

After the KAKEHASHI Project, we returned home with lots of information and activities to share. We were invited to a TV and radio program to talk briefly about the program and experience. With that experience we made our own Japanese Culture Day, and made our annual Japanese Culture Fest even better. We invited local Japanese residents and native locals with Japanese knowledge to perform, sell and be a part of it! We had traditional foods like *curry*, *anpan*, *taiyaki* and even clothes like *yukata*. Even a fusion band with regular acoustic instruments but also traditional Japanese instruments. We shared games and activities like origami, and calligraphy. Also promoted the Japanese language class by sharing with people a presentation on the language and made a lot of trivia and games for the public. Just as a way to share and inform people about Japan in a fun environment!

■ Message for the future

The KAKEHASHI Project gave us a bit of everything in our trip, new food experiences, new activities, new destinations, new learning opportunities, and new people to meet! We did a lot for such a short period of time. The opportunity to join the KAKEHASHI Project came into my life just when I needed it. A chance to experience beforehand what I want to do in the future, which is study in Japan. So now, thanks to this program, more than ever, I'm not afraid but excited to start! If you love to travel and experience new things, this program is for you!





Juan Carlos Velez Reyes

Program for University Students (University of Puerto Rico)

- **Participation period:** Dec. 19 - 26, 2023
- **Status at the time of participation:** University Student
- **Current Status:** University Student
- **Current affiliation:** University of Puerto Rico (Rio Piedras Campus)
- **Social Media:** [Instagram](#)

とてもサンキュー

■ Memories from the program

Going to Japan for the first time thanks to the KAKEHASHI Project was a unique experience to say the least. Walking around, enjoying the scenery, eating all sorts of foods, and talking to people was a part of the day top day. There was always something new to learn, like going on a little adventure through Japan with your friends and making new ones along the way. I remember we used to stay up late at night discussing the things we've seen and done through the day, always trying to do something, even if it was looking outside the window sharing snacks from the *konbini* to make every minute we were in Japan count.

One of my favorite memories is when I got to meet people and speak to them, we would share stories and information about our lives in our respective countries, get to know how it is to live in Japan, learn more about each others culture and overall get to make new friends and connections.

The home stay family was an experience where I got to experience what it would be like to live in a Japanese household and a daily life in Japan, even if it was only for a couple of days, I truly felt like I was a part of the family. We went on to walk around to explore the town with them, to a shrine, the mall and back home to sit down at the dinner table and watch TV. Every day there was something new and exciting to do, it's definitely an experience I'll never forget.

■ Message for the future

Talk to your fellow members about the things they've done that day, as it will make you become closer to each other, and you may learn about a new snack you want to get next time you go to the store!. You'll be able to meet a lot of people, so don't be shy and talk to them, even if you're not confident in your Japanese, because you'll have a great conversation regardless and you might make a new friend.





Alicia Maia Chang

Program for Japanese American Youth (JACL)

- ❑ **Participation period:** Jan. 16 - 23, 2024
- ❑ **Status at the time of participation:** University Student
- ❑ **Current Status:** Working Professional
- ❑ **Current affiliation:** Nichi Bei Foundation
- ❑ **Social Media:** [LinkedIn](#)

■ Memories from the program

Our trip began in Tokyo, where we explored the Tokyo National Museum, the Prime Minister's Office, and the historic Tokyo Station. An exhibit that stood out to me was a scroll of Buddhist teachings commissioned by *Ōnakatomi no Yasunaga*, a government official from present-day Aichi Prefecture. This project involved around ninety calligraphers working for over five years to copy Buddhist texts from Aichi and Kyoto.

From Tokyo, we flew to Iwakuni, where we learned how to make *kingyo* lanterns, explored Yanai City, and visited the Museum of Japanese Emigration to Hawaii. We learned about how Japanese immigrants built networks like *kenjinkai* to protect and support each other amidst discrimination and the Immigration Act of 1924.

One of the most meaningful parts of the trip was my homestay with my host family. We made freshly squeezed orange juice, went to a local *onsen* and had conversations about cultural differences and similarities.

In Hiroshima, we visited the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, where we saw survivors' drawings that depicted their firsthand experiences of the atomic bombing. We learned about the 8,000 students who were mobilized for demolition work on August 6, 1945, and the 6,000 who never returned home. It was a powerful reminder of the human cost of war and the importance of peace education.

■ Life after the program

Most recently, I attended the Asian American Studies Conference in Boston, continuing to explore the histories and identities we discussed in Japan. I now work as a Marketing Coordinator for Nichi Bei News, a newspaper based in San Francisco's Japantown, where we help tell stories that connect generations and educate the community. Outside of my full-time role, I also do consulting work for local nonprofits, providing design and marketing support for fundraising campaigns and community events. The KAKEHASHI Project deepened my sense of responsibility to serve as a bridge between Japan and the Japanese American community, which continues to guide both my career and creative work today.

■ Message for the future

Use what you've learned during the trip to strengthen your local communities and keep building the bridge between Japan and Japanese Americans in your own way.





Skylar Yebin Kim

Program for the Winners of Japanese Speech Contest

- ❑ **Participation period:** Jan. 21 - 28, 2024
- ❑ **Status at the time of participation:** University Student
- ❑ **Current Status:** University Student
- ❑ **Current affiliation:** University of California, Los Angeles
- ❑ **Social Media:** [Instagram](#), [LinkedIn](#)

Bridging Our Worlds Together

■ Memories from the program

It all began here—or rather, this was where I finally recognized the biggest steps I had taken in my Japanese-learning journey. I received the KAKEHASHI Award in late 2023 and took my first steps into Japan as an avid learner in January 2024. There, I met people with backgrounds similar to mine, whether in culture, tradition, or the many discoveries a familiar yet unknown country could offer. We were introduced to countless beauties we never would have found on our own; it truly takes a professional to reveal the hidden sides and unburied treasures of a place.

One of my favorite memories was staying with a host family in the fields where the greenest matcha tea leaves grew. In their home, we enjoyed deliciously prepared meals—sometimes even helping make dishes unique to the region. The warmth of that home made our stay especially intimate, allowing KAKEHASHI Project participants and host families to bond in a space different from our own yet equally filled with love.

At the end of the program, we delivered short speeches and shared our next steps after the KAKEHASHI Project.

■ Life after the program

One of my biggest dreams had been to study abroad in Japan, and I am proud to say I have now completed a full year abroad. Choosing to live in Japan for a year was difficult, but it was exactly what I wanted. Learning is a never-ending process, and I knew I would grow more by living in Japan than simply visiting. Even simple tasks—grocery shopping or recharging my transportation card on my phone—reminded me that I wasn't there just to tour, but to learn.

In my presentation, I also shared my desire to teach English in Japan one day. I'm happy to say I achieved that as well. During my study abroad, I was selected to teach at Waseda Junior and Senior High School in preparation for their *EIKEN* English proficiency exam. I later led a team from Shinagawa Etoile Girls' High School and even traveled with them to Kanazawa for their annual English camp. Watching students gain confidence in a subject they once doubted themselves in was incredibly rewarding.

The KAKEHASHI Project has extended another grateful hand after my first speech competition and welcomed me to Japan. Although I am an English and Japanese major, I also study Korean, hoping to connect these languages by building a bridge between them. A Korean speech competition noticed my tenacity in Japanese, and I was thrilled to be invited to host their first contest in 2025.

Some of the competition coordinators have known me since high school, but that was precisely when I started to officially learn Japanese and Korean—and when I became somewhat infamous for taking both foreign languages throughout the rest of my school years. Thank you, KAKEHASHI Project, for showing me much more of the world I want to bring closer and introduce this curiosity into the light for all of us to admire.

■ Message for the future

This is a start. Your start. You never know where this could take you in the future. To start, or not to start—sounds familiar? I'd say, do it. Stacking up experiences is the same thing as learning from a textbook and getting to use it in your everyday life. When else do you have this chance? Learning never stops—it grows and it may seem like sometimes it might be falling but it is simply to sprout new knowledge into your head. There is nothing you lose from learning, but only gain.





Vandhana Kammampati

Program for Japanese Language Communication

- ❑ **Participation period:** Jan. 21 - 28, 2024
- ❑ **Status at the time of participation:** University Student
- ❑ **Current Status:** Working Professional
- ❑ **Current affiliation:** University of British Columbia
- ❑ **Social Media:** [LinkedIn](#)

■ Memories from the program

Have you ever dreamed of reading manga or watching anime in its original Japanese version? I did, when I first discovered the world of manga at the age of 14. Ten years later, I finally can! And the KAKEHASHI Project was a big milestone in that journey. I've always wanted to visit Japan, but even after years of learning Japanese at University, that was nothing but a distant dream (thanks to a ramen-only level of student budget). So when I received an email saying I was selected for an all-expenses-paid 9-day cultural exchange in Japan, I thought it was a scam. But standing in Japan surrounded by a group of strangers-turned-friends, I realized it was real. And thus began the wonderful KAKEHASHI Journey! From shrines, where I drew a bad luck charm to amazing restaurants that we were taken to, every part of the experience was building to a memory I still cherish today. However, you would think that for someone like me who loves manga and anime, my most favourite part of the trip would be Akihabara or shopping for manga. Not at all! My favourite part was "The Homestay". A small, countryside family, an Uncle & his niece. That is all it took for me to realize the real benefit of learning a language I had been missing out on. The stories about their lives, their dreams, the love they shared through their food, their warm home they welcomed us into, everything about the experience changed my understanding on how intricately language and curiosity about a culture connects people. Since then, I have been focused more on how I could bring more people together in this world in my own way.

■ Life after the program

After I graduated, I went on to work with boutique consultancies, non-profits, and social impact & cultural organizations where I drew from my KAKEHASHI experience to advise on strategies and meaningful partnerships to bring different components of our society and world together. I currently run Alignin, a strategy and partnerships impact studio where I help organizations grow through the same values KAKEHASHI instilled in me: cultural empathy, storytelling, and connection.

■ Message for the future

My hope for the future is that I am able to continue to influence meaningful change in our world by bringing more people together through language & culture! My two cents to the next generation would be to say yes. Take every opportunity that comes your way. An email, a homestay, a conversation, if it feels aligned with your path, say yes! One experience like KAKEHASHI can open more doors than you ever imagined. 頑張ってね!





Katelyn Mo

Program for University Student (University of Waterloo)

- ❑ **Participation period:** Feb. 18 - 25, 2024
- ❑ **Status at the time of participation:** University Student
- ❑ **Current Status:** University Student
- ❑ **Current affiliation:** University of Waterloo

■ Memories from the program

Thinking back to my memories of KAKEHASHI Project, I am reminded of nothing short of a life-changing experience. While I had visited Japan a few times before, my KAKEHASHI experience was by far the best. The highlights of my trip were our one-day university exchange with Nagoya University, homestay with a Japanese family, and all the conversations I shared with my fellow participants. During the university exchange, Nagoya University students welcomed us with many cultural activities like *Origami* making and calligraphy. Even though there was a language barrier, we quickly became good friends and even went for Karaoke afterward! My favourite part was experiencing a tea ceremony, which allowed me to learn more about Japanese culture and want to incorporate these values into my everyday life. After our exchange, I stayed with a Japanese family and experienced what it's like to live in Japan for a day. I had insightful conversations about Japanese culture and also shared Canadian culture with the family. We exchanged gifts, tried calligraphy, visited a shrine, and even made scrapbooks. I am sincerely grateful for the time we shared with Nagoya University students and my homestay family. Finally, above all the places we visited and the delicious meals we ate, I am most fond of the conversations I had with fellow participants, program coordinators, and Japanese people. Being able to immerse myself in Japanese culture with other students with similar interests enabled us to form deep bonds and friendships.

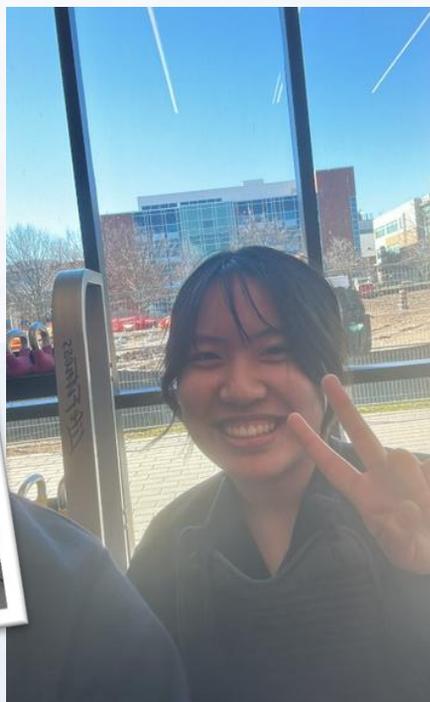
We had a lot of great conversations about our experiences and encouraged each other to try new things on the trip. Thank you to my fellow participants and JICE staff for making it a fun trip filled with laughter and happy memories!

■ Life after the program

After KAKEHASHI Project, I stayed in touch with a few participants and helped when Japanese KAKEHASHI participants visited my university. Currently, I am continuing my studies at the University of Waterloo and will be traveling to Japan next year to study abroad!

■ Message for the future

To participants of future exchange projects, I hope you thoroughly enjoy and immerse yourselves in the experiences offered to you. Participating in these projects are life-changing experiences, but it's important that you remain open-minded and try new things to get the most out of it. While new experiences can be intimidating, they are also opportunities for you to get out of your comfort zone once in a while. These opportunities allow us to grow and learn to be better people, while also making new connections with others. I wish you safe and happy travels!



My KAKEHASHI Stories

- Inbound Programs FY2024 -

- **Marie Ali Said El-Baden** --- Program for Winners of Japan Bowl (Canada)
- **Grigor Diran Avagyan** --- Program for Armenian American Young Leaders
- **Casey Suzuko Pedro** --- Program for Sports (Judo)
- **Akio Goto** --- Program for Japanese American Youth (JAACL)
- **Yoshiya Anderson** --- Program for Japanese American Youth (JAACL)
- **Alexandria Monet Evers** --- Program for the Princess Delegates
- **Shannon Priya Maharajh** --- Program for the Princess Delegates
- **Saidy Gabriela Burch** --- Program for Hispanic American Young Leaders
- **Lawrence Barss** --- Program for Japanese Language Communication

Marie Ali Said El-Baden

Program for Winners of Japan Bowl (Canada)

- ❑ **Participation period:** Jul. 17 - 23, 2024
- ❑ **Status at the time of participation:** High School Student
- ❑ **Current Status:** High school student
- ❑ **Current affiliation:** Merivale High School
- ❑ **Social Media:** [LinkedIn](#)



The Special Impact of KAKEHASHI

■ Memories from the program

The KAKEHASHI Project was a truly special experience for me, especially as someone who has always had a deep interest in Japanese culture and language from a young age. The most memorable part of the program was our visit to Fukushima Prefecture, where we stayed for one night with host families and explored the many incredible sites the area had to offer. We visited Aizuwakamatsu Castle and took part in cultural workshops, including making our own *Akabeko*, the traditional folk toy the region is famous for. During my homestay in the town of Kitakata City, I lived with a Japanese host family and experienced everyday life in Fukushima Prefecture. I had the chance to practice speaking Japanese, learn about the local community, and truly see what life was like for people in the prefecture. This experience deepened my appreciation for Japanese culture and gave me a stronger sense of connection to the country. After returning from the KAKEHASHI Project, I became even more involved in Japan-related initiatives, especially those focused on strengthening Canada-Japan relations. During my time in Japan, I had the opportunity to visit the Canadian Embassy in Tokyo and learn about the long-standing diplomatic ties between our two countries.

■ Life after the program

Later, back home in Ottawa, I continued my involvement by attending cultural events and workshops at the Japanese Embassy, where I could stay connected to the community and continue learning. Thanks to KAKEHASHI, in November 2024, I was invited to the Japanese Ambassador's Residence to celebrate the 2024 JET alumni, as a KAKEHASHI alumna. At my high school, where I am currently a senior, I also work with visiting students from Osaka Gakugei Senior High School as part of a study-abroad partnership between the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board and the Ottawa Education Network. Sharing my experiences from Japan has allowed me to build meaningful friendships and help create natural exchanges between our languages and cultures. After graduating high school, I plan to attend the University of Ottawa to study Political Science. My goal is to later join the JET Programme and pursue a career in diplomacy, where I hope to continue strengthening Canada's relationship with Japan and build lasting connections with other countries around the world.

■ Message for the future

I believe I am not the only one whose life has been deeply shaped by the KAKEHASHI Project. Although the program is short, the experiences and connections gained are lasting. Through cultural visits and the homestay, I was able to understand Japan in a more personal and meaningful way. The KAKEHASHI Project was my first time visiting Japan and Asia, and it inspired me to explore Japan's culture more deeply and promote bilateral relations between Canada and Japan. I hope this project continues to grow, giving more young people the chance to connect with Japan.





Grigor Diran Avagyan

Program for Armenian American Young Leaders

- ❑ **Participation period:** Oct. 23 - 29, 2024
- ❑ **Status at the time of participation:** Working Professional
- ❑ **Current Status:** Working Professional
- ❑ **Current Affiliation:** Western Diocese of the Armenian Church
- ❑ **Social Media:** [LinkedIn](#), [Book about KAKEHASHI trip](#)

KAKEHASHI: THE POWER OF HUMAN CONNECTION

■ Memories from the program

I had the distinct honor and privilege of leading a delegation of Armenian-American young leaders from Los Angeles to Japan as part of the 2024 KAKEHASHI trip. I kept telling my delegation members that, in order to internalize the wonders of Japan and the gift of connection the KAKEHASHI Project offers, it is important to keep open minds and open hearts. While we may come from diverse ethnic, cultural, educational, religious, and social backgrounds, we all share in our humanity the universal values that transcend differences. The story I want to share with you is a testimony to human interconnectedness.

On a late Monday evening, the day before our return to LA, I decided to take a walk in the neighborhood where our hotel was located. Passing by little shops, restaurants, and boutiques, I noticed a cozy coffee shop radiating warmth from within. Being a coffee lover, I couldn't resist stepping inside, hoping to find some specialty beans to bring back to the United States as a gift. The aroma of freshly roasted coffee was incredible—I could smell notes of berries, chocolate, vanilla, nuts, and oats. I picked out two different bags of beans for my friends and proceeded to check out. The woman behind the counter said, "Sir, I roasted these beans this morning... for the last time." She went on to explain, with a stoic expression, "It's our last day—we are closing permanently." I paused, looked into her eyes, and said, "I'm so sorry to hear that." At that moment, she burst into tears. I created a safe space for her to express her emotions, something less common in Japanese culture.

I validated her feelings and affirmed her experience. It was a deeply emotional moment that touched my heart. "Sorry, sorry, sir," she said, wiping her tears with a tissue. "You don't need permission to express yourself," I gently encouraged her. Wanting to support her in a culturally sensitive way, I thought of buying more beans but realized I only had space for two bags in my suitcase. Unsure what to do, I opened my wallet and saw that the only cash I had was a 10,000-yen bill. I placed the money in the tray and noticed that the new bill featured the portrait of Shibusawa Eiichi—the father of Japanese capitalism and a great humanitarian who had supported Armenian refugees after the Genocide. As she looked for change in the register, I asked, "Do you know whose portrait is on the bill?" "This person helped my people during a very difficult time," I told her. "Today, I want to return the favor and support you. Please accept this as a small token of appreciation." Tears welled up again, this time with gratitude and joy.

■ Life after the program

A month later, I received an email from her that read: "Dear Diran, How are you? The new store finally opened today! You were supportive enough that day. Thanks to you, I was able to do my best. Thank you for your support. I'm happy now. I will do my best to keep the store going and roasting great coffee! We look forward to seeing you again."

■ Message for the future

For me, this is the true meaning of KAKEHASHI.





Casey Suzuko Pedro

Program for Sports (Judo)

- ❑ **Participation period:** Dec. 03 - 09, 2024
- ❑ **Status at the time of participation:** Working Professional
- ❑ **Current Status:** Working Professional
- ❑ **Current affiliation:** FUJI Sports & CRAWL Martial Arts LLC
- ❑ **Social Media:** [Instagram](#), [Instagram](#), [Facebook](#)

My KAKEHASHI Story

Memories from the program

When I departed from Boston to Tokyo for the KAKEHASHI Judo Program in 2024, I had no idea how profoundly the experience would shape my life. When I first applied, I did not know which region of Japan I would visit. The itinerary was revealed later, and to my surprise, I learned that I would not only travel to Tokyo and the historic *Kodokan* Judo Institute but also to the southern island of Kyushu—the very place where my grandmother was born and where my mother lived as a toddler. It felt like more than coincidence; it felt meant to be, as if this journey were guiding me home.

Our group traveled across Japan, learning about history, culture, and the art of connection that defines the Japanese way of life. From the vibrant streets of Akihabara to the tranquility of Miyazaki, every encounter left a lasting impression.

Visiting the *Kodokan* was especially meaningful. As a lifelong judoka, learning about Jigoro Kano’s vision of harmony, respect, and mutual prosperity gave me a deeper appreciation for the art’s true purpose beyond competition. It was also incredibly special to see, for the first time, the exhibit honoring my father in the IJF Hall of Fame. In that moment, I felt connected to both the roots of judo and my family’s place within its history.

Another powerful coincidence occurred during our time on Kyushu. At Miyazaki High School, the judo class was led by the legendary Kenzo Nakamura, who competed in the same weight category as my father, Jimmy Pedro, and faced him in several international tournaments. Meeting Nakamura Sensei on the same island my grandmother called home felt like a bridge between cultures and generations. It was an honor to speak with Nakamura Sensei about my family and our shared passion for judo.

Life after the program

Returning home, I carried with me a renewed sense of purpose. The KAKEHASHI experience taught me that the values of judo—respect, humility, and continuous self-improvement—are not only principles to live by on the mat, but also tools for building bridges between people and cultures. I poured this inspiration into expanding CRAWL Martial Arts LLC, which helps academies launch parent and

toddler martial art programs. These classes teach core values of Confidence, Respect, Awareness, Willpower, and Leadership through play and family bonding, while introducing families to judo & Japanese culture and vocabulary. Words like *rei* (bow), *gi* (uniform), and *hajime* (begin) help children develop cultural awareness through movement and mindfulness.

The KAKEHASHI Project also influenced the creation of the FUJI Heritage Project, a high-end product line we are developing with FUJI Sports. We began with the *Keishō* Edition, meaning “inheritance” or “succession.” During the program, our group visited the Meiji Jingu Gaien Ginkgo Avenue in Tokyo, where the golden leaves inspired the collection’s motif. The design blends the ginkgo leaf, symbolizing endurance and timeless strength, with Jigoro Kano’s legacy and Mount Fuji’s sacred presence, reflecting Japan’s enduring spirit.

I also stayed in touch with my homestay host in Miyazaki, who became like family. In August 2025, I visited her again while on my honeymoon to Kyushu. Without the KAKEHASHI Project, I am not sure whether I would have chosen Kyushu as part of our travels. The experience gave me the confidence to explore Japan, deepened my spiritual connection to my heritage, and inspired me to continue learning about my family’s roots.

Message for the future

To future KAKEHASHI participants, approach this experience with curiosity and gratitude. Every place you visit and every person you meet has something to teach you. The program is more than an exchange; it is a reminder that we are all connected through shared values, respect, and kindness. Whether through judo, art, or everyday acts of appreciation, we each have the ability to build bridges in our own way. For me, the KAKEHASHI Project marked the beginning of a lifelong relationship with Japan, my heritage, and the global judo community. My wish is that every participant finds their own bridge through this experience and continues to cross it again and again, in pursuit of understanding and unity.

PHOTOS





Akio Goto

Program for Japanese American Youth (JAACL)

- ❑ **Participation period:** Dec. 12 - 18, 2024
- ❑ **Status at the time of participation:** Working Professional
- ❑ **Current Status:** Working Professional
- ❑ **Current affiliation:** Row 7 Seed Co
- ❑ **Social Media:** [Instagram](#)

From Yomitan to Los Angeles

■ Memories from the program

When I think back on my time in the KAKEHASHI Project, the first thing that comes to mind is the warmth of the Yomitan community in Okinawa. Our host family welcomed us not only into their home, but into their daily life. By sharing meals, culture, and conversations, we felt connected in a way that went beyond language.

One evening, I asked my host mother what she hoped I would take away from this trip. She told me, "The warm smiles and welcoming nature of the Okinawan people." That became the heart of my experience. Everywhere we went, from local shops to community gatherings, we were met with genuine kindness. Their hospitality was gentle and unspoken, shown through simple gestures like sharing food, offering stories, or taking time to talk.

It was not tourism. It was being welcomed, cared for, and seen in a deeply human way. In Yomitan, I experienced everyday hospitality not as something performed, but as something lived.

■ Life after the program

After returning home, the impact of the program continued to grow. The friendships I built with other Japanese Americans helped me better understand my identity. Through shared stories, traditions, and experiences, the meaning of being Japanese American deepened for me, and I realized my journey is part of a larger story and that I am not alone in it. These relationships encouraged me to take pride in my heritage and to feel more connected to my roots. We continue to stay involved in JAACL and local Japanese

American community events, supporting cultural storytelling and community care.

Influenced by the program, I have also begun sharing content online that highlights Japanese ingredients and products, with the hope of giving voice to Japanese Americans at home. To me, food is a bridge that feels familiar and comforting, inviting people in. I hope to introduce more people to the beauty of Japanese ingredients and traditions in a way that is approachable, mindful, and rooted in heritage.

■ Message for the future

For future participants, I hope you enter the program with curiosity, openness, and a willingness to slow down. The KAKEHASHI Project offers the rare opportunity to experience Japan not as a visitor, but as someone welcomed into a community.

Cultural exchange is not only about landmarks or history lessons. It is also built through sharing meals, learning everyday routines, and being present with others. The KAKEHASHI Project creates space for conversations that connect the past, present, and future of Japanese and Japanese American identities. It encourages mutual trust and understanding, and it opens doors for friendships and collaboration across borders. There is so much to learn in the small moments. From a shared smile, a quiet walk, or a meal prepared with intention, I hope future participants allow those moments to shape them, just as they shaped me.

This program reminded me that bridges are built not only through knowledge, but through care. And those are the bridges that last.





Yoshiya Anderson

Program for Japanese American Youth (JAAL)

- ❑ **Participation period:** Dec. 12 - 18, 2024
- ❑ **Status at the time of participation:** University Student
- ❑ **Current Status:** University Student
- ❑ **Current affiliation:** Michigan State University

Visiting Hiroshima for the first time

■ Memories from the program

Last December 2024, I finally had the opportunity to visit Hiroshima City for the first time in my life as a participant of the KAKEHASHI Project, organized by the Japanese American Citizens League, Japan International Cooperation Center, and Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan.

Hiroshima is a very special place for me since it is where my family originates. Visiting the Hiroshima Peace Memorial was a very meaningful experience because the atomic bombing that took place 80 years ago continues to shape how I view my ethnic background as an American-born Japanese living in a western society, where my upbringing is overlooked. While I have long seen pictures of the city at a very young age, observing the atomic bomb ruins in real life was an experience I never would have imagined getting to do. I am now much more thankful for being able to enjoy peace and hope other parts of the world will be able to someday see peace as well.

In addition to visiting Hiroshima, I am also especially grateful for having had the opportunity to meet with students from Fukuyama University, for my homestay family that allowed me to spend time with them, for having had the opportunity to meet with the Special Advisor to the Prime Minister, for getting to meet with other Japanese Americans, and for all the other experiences the program offered.

■ Life after the program

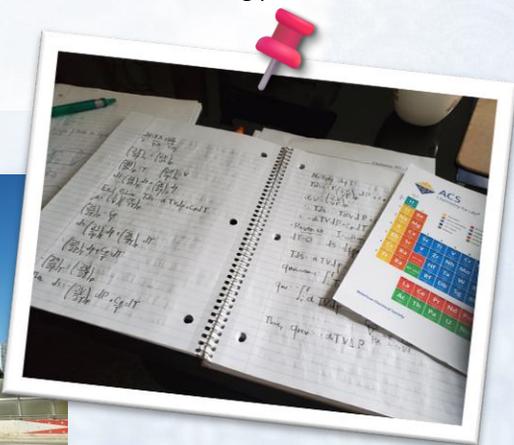
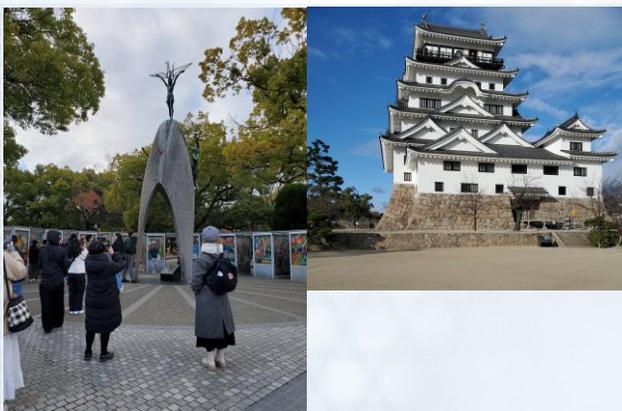
I am in the midst of finishing graduate studies in chemical engineering. Once I finish my education, I may consider looking for career opportunities with Japanese companies either domestically or in Japan where my background could

be of use.

In addition to my graduate education, I have also developed a recent hobby learning more about Japanese and Japanese American history. I wish to look for outlets where I can share some of my interpretations as an ethnic Japanese, since I feel that American society has a very limited understanding of Japanese history that often leads to misinformation or exaggerations, particularly on social media platforms, promoting anti-Japanese sentiment. Given that Japan and the United States maintain strong ties, I think it is especially important that accurate information gets told of Japanese people. Moreover, as I recognize increasing interests in Japanese culture within the United States, I wish to educate more Americans on issues regarding appropriation of Japanese culture and identity, since I feel that voices of Japanese Americans are often ignored on these issues.

■ Message for the future

For Japanese Americans who are considering participating in the program, it is important to understand that the Japanese diaspora is very diverse, since people have all been brought up in different backgrounds. This means you will meet people who are both very similar and different from yourself. When visiting Japan, be prepared to feel disconnected, relieved, and excited. For some, like myself, rather than feeling culture shock, you may feel cultural relief, since you will finally be able to experience the society you were raised under. For others, however, Japan will be a completely new, unfamiliar, and exciting place.





Alexandria Monet Evers

Program for the Princess Delegates

- ❑ **Participation period:** Jan. 22 - 28, 2025
- ❑ **Status at the time of participation:** Working Professional
- ❑ **Current Status:** Working Professional
- ❑ **Current affiliation:** Self-Employed Digital Marketing & Communications Consultant
- ❑ **Social Media:** [LinkedIn](#)

A Window into Japan: Reflections from the KAKEHASHI Trip

■ Memories from the program

The KAKEHASHI Project opened a window into Japan, where every encounter offered insight, connection, and perspective. Some of my most vivid memories come from the afternoon we spent tea rolling in Shizuoka, learning about a 400-year-old tradition rooted in craft, patience, and care. The tactile experience of shaping tea leaves by hand brought history to life. Equally unforgettable was meeting the women of the Gotemba Fire Brigade, whose warmth and pride reflected an extraordinary spirit of hospitality and community. Their excitement in welcoming us was a reminder that diplomacy is not only practiced in formal rooms, but in how people choose to show up for one another.

One of our courtesy calls that stands out clearly is our meeting with Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs, Arfiya Eri. Her poise, authenticity, and commitment to uplifting the next generation were inspiring, offering wisdom as an invitation to contribute to improving the world around us. It's a conversation that continues to resonate with me. Seeing the Sakura Foundation Sakura Queen again, this time in her home country after first meeting in Washington, DC, felt like a symbolic full circle, a testament to the continuity of exchange and shared traditions that transcend borders.

■ Life after the program

When the program concluded, I built on its momentum. I returned home with a renewed commitment to people-to-people diplomacy and stepped into a leadership role with the U.S. National Cherry Blossom Program, which fosters US-Japan relations through professional development for emerging women leaders. I am entering my second year as a

national coordinator and serve as a liaison to the Japanese Embassy, helping to connect the program with cultural engagements. I also remain engaged with Japanese communities in New England, collaborating with local Japan-America Societies and supporting cultural moments like Sake Day celebrations.

One of the most meaningful ways I honored my KAKEHASHI Project experience was by publishing a book combining my photography with reflections from the journey, fulfilling my KAKEHASHI action plan, and capturing memories I hope will inspire future participants.

■ Message for the future

The KAKEHASHI Project instilled in me a lasting courage, one rooted in openness, curiosity, and the belief that meaningful connections begin where comfort zones end. It taught me that diplomacy is not only the domain of governments, but something practiced by individuals willing to show care, interest, and respect for one another. For future participants, I would encourage embracing each experience fully, whether it is a formal visit with leaders, a cultural workshop, or moments with a host family, because each provides a unique perspective on culture and connection. Approaching the program with openness and intention offers lessons not only about Japan, but also about yourself, the way you engage with others, and the positive impact you can create. Staying engaged after the program, through leadership roles, cultural programming, or simply nurturing the connections you've made, magnifies the value of the exchange and helps ensure the bridges you build continue to flourish. The KAKEHASHI is not only a program name. It is a practice, a mindset, and a responsibility I intend to carry forward.

PHOTOS





Shannon Priya Maharajh

Program for the Princess Delegates

- ❑ **Participation period:** Jan. 22 - 28, 2025
- ❑ **Status at the time of participation:** Working Professional
- ❑ **Current Status:** Working Professional
- ❑ **Current affiliation:** The Boeing Company and Georgetown University

(Sakura) Blossoms Building Bridges

■ Memories from the program

Kimonos, shrines, postcards, emergency management (EM), aviation, and space exploration characterize my experience in the KAKEHASHI Project as a Sakura Princess representing Florida, United States.

One cherished memory from my trip involved Gotemba City's female Fire Brigade—the only volunteer corps of its kind throughout Japan. The corps support firefighters and EM personnel in preparedness and response operations for a myriad of disasters there. I presented a speech which highlighted similarities between Florida and Japan's EM frameworks. This KAKEHASHI experience kickstarted an unwavering friendship with Tomomi Hayashibe, assistant Brigade leader. Our interactions transcend countries. We frequently exchange emails and mail postcards from our travels.

Another fond interaction was with the Koujimachi Fire Department at Hie Shrine, which I encountered by pure coincidence. I explained my role in the Florida EM sector to fire chiefs and shared my contact information. I was delighted to know the Tokyo Fire Department published an article about my interaction coupled with photos they captured as I spoke to the chiefs (unbeknownst to me). Those images conveyed my passion and interest about how disasters are handled under their jurisdiction.

Throughout participation, I noticed my interests forming multiple KAKEHASHI connections between Florida and Japan.

■ Life after the program

I work for The Boeing Company, an aerospace defense manufacturer that sustains the C-17 Globemaster III defense aircraft. An article was published company-wide upon return. Matt Smith, C-17 Customer Coordinator, kindly describe the following regarding my impact from the KAKEHASHI Project "Shannon used her selection to the United States Cherry Blossom Princess Program as an opportunity to share her Emergency & Disaster Management training and aviation-support experience. She returned with stories that reinvigorated our office. Her passion landed a Boeing News Now feature — read by over 170,000 employees and counting — that cast her as an advocate for aviation

and disaster relief, spotlighting the resilient people of Japan and the C-17's humanitarian role in the 2011 'triple disaster'. Shannon not only represented the Cherry Blossom Princess Program abroad; she highlighted it across a global workforce by showing that professional aspirations and personal volunteerism go hand in hand."

It is evident from the above that this endeavor has not only allowed me to make a positive impact upon dignitaries and EM personnel in Japan, but also across Boeing through my employment here in the United States.

I am also a Solar System Ambassador for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), which partners closely with the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) throughout the Commercial Crew Program. While abroad, I was grateful to share my knowledge with members of the House of Representative about JAXA astronauts launching to the International Space Station from Florida which at the time was Takuya Onishi. It is an immense honored to be able to continually participate in a program which fosters international curiosity for the future of space exploration.

■ Message for the future

Cultural exchange opportunities provide participants with a breadth of experiences curated to their interests. This in turn encourages participants to develop a steadfast connection between their countries and Japan—which broadens their understanding of international relationships. There will always be a KAKEHASHI, no matter how niche interests may be. Be bold, courageous, and outspoken about your passions, as it can lead to fruitful and extraordinary opportunities to make an impact in the world. Remain open to learn from others and enjoy wonderful international friendships, too. that connect the past, present, and future of Japanese and Japanese American identities. It encourages mutual trust and understanding, and it opens doors for friendships and collaboration across borders. There is so much to learn in the small moments. From a shared smile, a quiet walk, or a meal prepared with intention, I hope future participants allow those moments to shape them, just as they shaped me.

This program reminded me that bridges are built not only through knowledge, but through care. And those are the bridges that last.

PHOTOS



Saidy Gabriela Burch

Program for Hispanic American Young Leaders

- ❑ **Participation period:** Jan. 29 - Feb. 04, 2025
- ❑ **Status at the time of participation:** University Student
- ❑ **Current Status:** Working Professional
- ❑ **Current affiliation:** MANATEE Human Neuroscience Laboratory, University of Miami
- ❑ **Social Media:** [LinkedIn](#), [Instagram](#)



■ Memories from the program

I cannot pinpoint an exact reason why I first began learning Japanese. In fact, if you had asked me the reason back when I first started learning—scouring the Internet for any and all Japanese learning websites during my high school free periods—I probably would have said “everything.” Coming up on my final semester as a college student, one of my Japanese professors reached out and introduced me to the KAKEHASHI Project. She encouraged me to apply for their upcoming program for Hispanic American students. Only a few months later, I found myself on a plane with three other groupmates, headed for Japan!

After a first night in Tokyo, our group traveled to Wakayama, where we stayed with an incredibly kind and generous host family in the rural mountains of *Inami*. I will never forget the taste of the mikan juice our *Okaa-san* served us, freshly made from her farm. During our stay, we got to experience sleeping in traditional futon on tatami (they kept us warm through the Japanese winter nights)! Every day was full of vibrance. Our guides took us to try local foods (*soba*, chicken *katsu*, and *curry* were some of my favorites!), meet with local government leaders, and experience Japanese traditions first-hand. I and the other girls in my group even had the privilege of wearing *kimono* to a local temple.

Throughout the experience, Japan’s lively engagement with its rich history was inspiring. Japan has a reverence for tradition that walks hand-in-hand with its energy for innovation—and this is a spirit I hope to encourage in my own country.

■ Life after the program

Since my time participating in the KAKEHASHI Project, I have graduated from the University of Miami with a B.S. in Mathematics, a B.A. in English, and a minor in Japanese. I am currently employed as a post-baccalaureate neuroscience laboratory manager and researcher, in preparation for pursuing my PhD in neuroscience. In addition to inspiring me to continue my study of the Japanese language, the KAKEHASHI Project has invigorated my admiration for Japan as a scientific powerhouse. I closely follow the work of many of Japan’s neuroscientists—among whom are some of the field’s leading figures!

■ Message for the future

My experiences from the KAKEHASHI Project are ones that will remain close to my heart for the rest of my life. I encourage anyone with a passion for Japanese culture or language to explore the wonderful opportunities offered by JICE. I will forever be grateful to the KAKEHASHI Project for expanding my worldview and inspiring me to do what I can to further encourage friendship and collaboration between Japan and the United States.



PHOTOS



Lawrence Barss

Program for Japanese Language Communication

- ❑ **Participation period:** Feb. 05 - 11, 2025
- ❑ **Status at the time of participation:** University Student
- ❑ **Current Status:** University Student
- ❑ **Current affiliation:** Carleton University
- ❑ **Social Media:** [LinkedIn](#)

■ Memories from the program

My first memory of the KAKEHASHI Project dates from when I first got off the plane in Tokyo. It was the evening, though to my mind, still on Ottawa time, it seemed to be the middle of the night. I arrived with little sleep, a dubiously functional SIM card, and no little trepidation at being all alone on the other side of the world. As soon as I was through customs and entered the arrivals terminal, however, all was well: I was immediately found by people from the KAKEHASHI Project and welcomed to Japan. Indeed, this first encounter set the tone for the entire visit. My most vivid memory of my time in Japan is not of any place I visited, nor food I ate, nor even thing I learned, but of how unfailingly hospitable everyone was. Whether it was the people at JICE, my wonderful host family, or random people on the street and in stores, people always seemed to be ready to welcome a stranger. The feeling of being so welcomed is not something which I think I will soon forget. That being said, I also have vivid memories of the cultural experiences I had in Japan. It was amazing to be able to step into what seemed like a different world, and even better to discover that maybe it was not so different after all. I particularly remember our visit to the Koshoji temple in Nagoya City, where we briefly toured the grounds and then participated in a tea ceremony. I found that the simple act of drinking tea—something I do every day—was transfigured by its situation in a special place, at a special time, with a total focus on the act itself. This is one way in which I think my time in Japan helped me gain a new perspective on life.

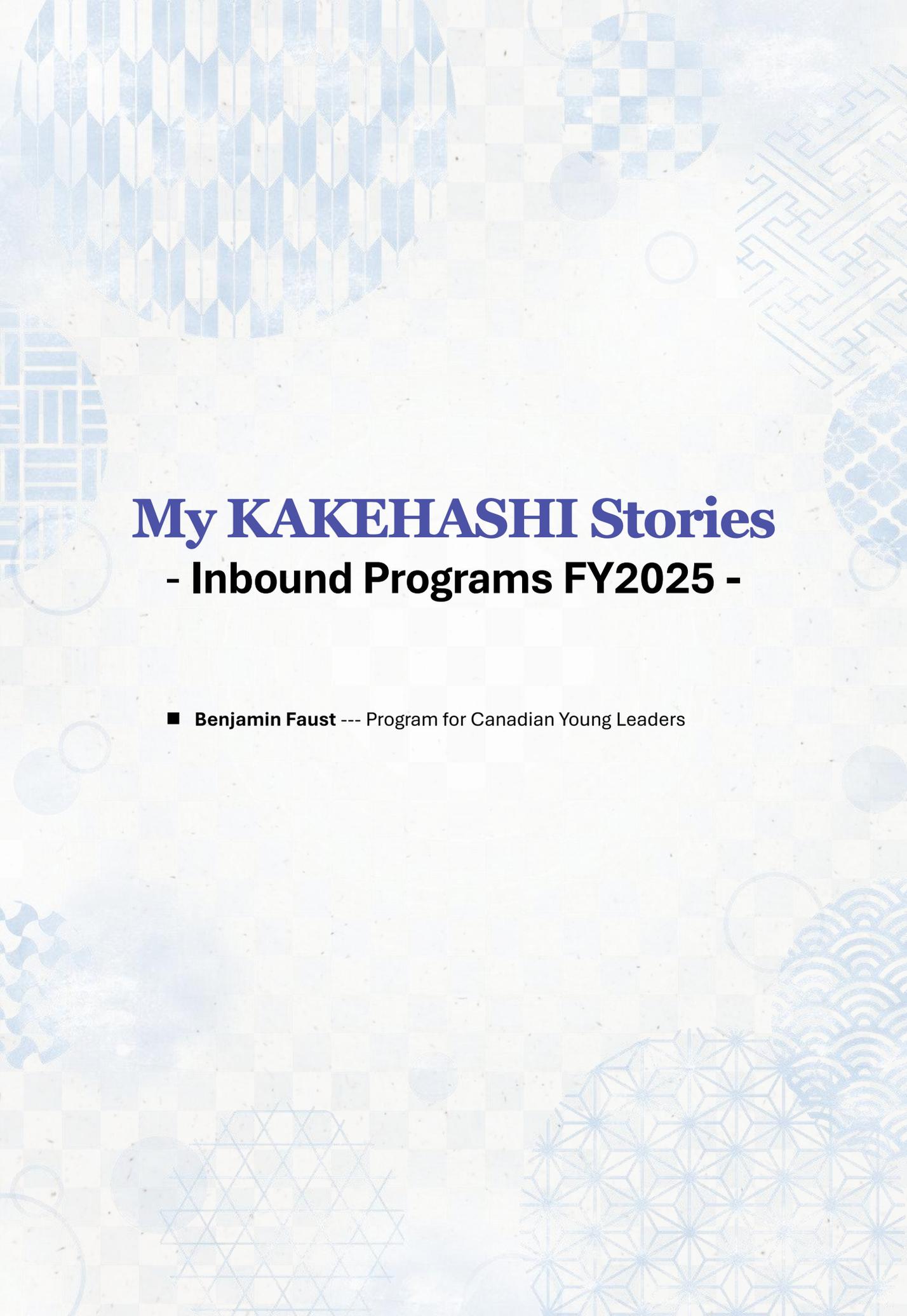
■ Life after the program

These days, I am back in Ottawa, majoring in humanities at Carleton University. I am still studying Japanese, and in fact doing so with renewed vigour after my time in Japan. I try to stay in touch with my fellow KAKEHASHI participants, with whom I became quite close during the week we spent together. There are a few Japan and Japanese-related societies and activities at my school, with which I am involved. Outside of school and Japanese, I continue to compete all around Ontario as part of Carleton's varsity fencing team.

■ Message for the future

My main advice for future participants is to try as many new things as possible! Participating in the KAKEHASHI Project is a tremendous privilege, and it would be a shame not to enjoy it to its fullest extent. Talk to as many people as you can, both your fellow participants and people you meet in Japan, and don't be afraid to try things that you find strange or daunting. Remember that as long as you stay curious, enthusiastic, and respectful, the world is your oyster.





My KAKEHASHI Stories

- Inbound Programs FY2025 -

■ **Benjamin Faust** --- Program for Canadian Young Leaders



Benjamin Faust

Program for Canadian Young Leaders

- **Participation period:** Nov. 24 - 30, 2025
- **Status at the time of participation:** Working Professional
- **Current Status:** Working Professional
- **Current affiliation:** University of Toronto
- **Social Media:** [LinkedIn](#)

■ Memories from the program

It was an honour to participate in the 2025–2026 KAKEHASHI Project Canadian Young Leader Cohort. Through the program, I had the opportunity to engage in many fascinating conversations and learn more about Japan–Canada relations—particularly how our two nations can continue to support and benefit one another. I also had the chance to experience Japanese culture in person for the first time, which was truly memorable.

Highlights of my KAKEHASHI experience included a visit to the Embassy of Canada to Japan, where we met with embassy staff and discussed opportunities for people-to-people connections between Japan and Canada, as well as ongoing efforts to strengthen educational ties and expand future opportunities for both countries. Another high point was meeting the Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs and hearing about the opportunities our nations share—especially during challenging global times—as strategic partners in the Indo-Pacific. These discussions reinforced for me the importance of people-to-people initiatives like the KAKEHASHI Project in strengthening mutual understanding and diplomacy.

Another incredible experience during KAKEHASHI was our visit to Hokkaidō, where we learned about Ainu culture, history, and the ongoing challenges faced by the Ainu people. The visit underscored similarities with the experiences of Indigenous peoples in Canada, offering important reflections on shared histories and the work still needed to support Indigenous communities in both countries.

KAKEHASHI Project was an incredibly insightful experience—meeting leaders from government and industry, speaking with startups commercializing university technology in rural Hokkaidō and Tokyo, and engaging with the Ainu. These conversations offered valuable perspectives on the future of Japan–Canada relations. I am grateful to everyone who made my trip possible, particularly the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan.

■ Message for the future

I look forward to contributing to the strengthening of Japan–Canada relations through my future academic studies and career—hopefully advancing economic and security cooperation, and people-to-people connections between our two countries in my own small way.



My KAKEHASHI Stories

- Outbound Programs FY2016 ・ FY2017 -

- 小松 明美 (Akemi KOMATSU) ---大学生派遣プログラム (埼玉大学)
- 千葉 瑠実佳 (Rumika CHIBA) ---大学生派遣プログラム (東海大学)
- 渡邊 心 (Shin WATANABE) ---高校生派遣プログラム (日本大学三島高等学校)
- 川又 湧也 (Yuya KAWAMATA) ---イノウエ・プログラム派遣 (福島大学)



小松 明美 (Akemi KOMATSU)

大学生派遣プログラム (埼玉大学)

- プログラム実施時期: 2017年2月8日-2月15日
- 参加当時の属性: 大学生
- 現在の属性: 社会人
- 所属先: 川崎市立川崎高等学校
- SNSアカウント: [Facebook](#)

■ KAKEHASHIでの思い出

私がカケハシ・プロジェクトに参加したのは、アメリカの教育がどのように行われ、児童・生徒たちがどんな日常を送っているのかを知りたいという思いからでした。実際に未就学児から中学生までが一貫して学ぶ学校を訪れた際、子どもたちが自分のアイデンティティとして多様な国の背景を大々的に掲示している様子が強く印象に残りました。また、小学生向けに日本紹介をする機会をいただいた際、その教室の壁一面が日本語の掲示物で飾られており、日本と日本文化がシアトルでこれほど受け入れられ、興味を持たれていることに嬉しさを感じました。その後訪れた「シアトル日本町」はさらに衝撃的でした。移民史の知識はかろうじて持っていたものの、実際に人々の生活や、老人ホームに暮らす日系の方々や日本文化を大切に守っている姿、そして日系二世アーティストが自身の葛藤を作品に表す姿などを目の当たりにし、多角的に「海外における日本」を感じることができました。特にそのアーティストの作品が心に残り、私は卒業論文のテーマを「エスニックアイデンティティと日系人」と定めるきっかけとなりました。

■ 参加後の活動や近況

現在は高校英語教員として働く傍ら、海外にルーツを持つ子どもたちと関われる活動にも取り組んでいます。今年度はJICA教師海外研修に参加し、南米パラグアイの日系社会について学んでいます。海外に移住した日本人がどのような背景を抱え、どのように今を生きているのかを知るとは、日本で生きる私たちにとっても大切なメッセージになると考えています。多文化や歴史を学び、生徒たちが「自分ごと」として考えるきっかけを作れるよう、日々奮闘しています。

■ 未来へのメッセージ

SNSが普及したことで誰かと「つながる」ことは容易になりましたが、その一方で、つながりそのものが軽視されてしまう場面も増えているように感じます。だからこそ、これからの国際交流では、人と人とが互いの文化や歴史、そしてその人自身を理解し、歩み寄っていく姿勢こそが、決して忘れてはならない大切な要素だと考えます。私自身、大学時代に留学生のバディを務め、日本語のサポートをしながら友人として関わってきた経験が、人としての視野や深みを広げてくれたと感じています。衝突や失敗を恐れて自分の殻に閉じこもってしまうのは、とてももったいないことです。少しだけ外に目を向け、思い切って一歩を踏み出して「挑戦」してみることを、心から応援しています。私自身もその気持ちを忘れず、これからも努力を重ねていきたい所存です。





千葉 瑠実佳 (Rumika CHIBA)

大学生派遣プログラム (東海大学)

- プログラム実施時期: 2017年2月22日-3月1日
- 参加当時の属性: 大学生
- 現在の属性: 社会人
- 所属先: Osmosis AI Convergence Ltd
- SNSアカウント: [LinkedIn](#)

■ KAKEHASHIでの思い出

派遣先へ行く前に校内で開催した勉強会では、ミシガンは廃墟だらけで荒廃した街だと見聞きした。しかし、実際は過去の財政破綻の面影が無いほど街は栄えていた。さらに驚いたのは、工場での安全に対する日米での対応の違いだ。Ford Rouge Factoryでは作業員が軽装備のままイヤホンで音楽を聴きながら働いていた。日本の工場にあるような安全第一の横断幕も無かった。また、私はチームメンバーと共に富士通テン(現:デンソーテン)や学校で日本の新幹線の利便性や快適性に関する発表をした。米国の中でも特に車社会であり、Fordの本社が所在するミシガンでは、新幹線どころか一度も電車に乗ったことがない人がいた。子供の頃から一人で公共交通機関で移動していた私には衝撃的だった。

■ 参加後の活動や近況

プログラム後はトビタテ! 留学JAPANの一環でニューヨークに1年間留学し、英語の学習と、自動運転ドローンの分野で学生インターンを行った。2024年にはRumiCar(高校から続けている、誰でも簡単に自動運転の開発ができるプロジェクト)のイベント開催協力のため、再びミシガンへ行った。イベント後は企業や学校を訪問し、社員や学生に対してRumiCarを宣伝した。色々な場所へ臆せず訪問し、初対面の人に説明できるのはカケハシ・プロジェクトでの経験のおかげだ。

同年にカケハシ・プロジェクト対面学生会議にも参加した。植物工場を見学し、水素エネルギーの博物館で学んだことや持続可能な社会のために実践したいことをプレゼンやSNSで発信した。現在はロンドンで自動運転の企業に勤務している。ケンブリッジではRumiCarのプログラミングのイベントも開催した。Hyper Japan(英国最大の日本文化イベント)でおにぎり屋での販売に協力もした。このように日本文化イベントに協力したり、英国での気づきをSNSに投稿するのはカケハシ・プロジェクトの名残りである。

■ 未来へのメッセージ

短期や長期に関わらず海外に滞在できる機会は利用してください。海外へ行って損や後悔をすることはありません。カケハシ・プロジェクトに続いて長期留学、海外勤務へと挑戦してください。カケハシ・プロジェクトでは志が高い人と出会うことができます。一緒に活動した仲間と留学先が一緒だったり、国際的な活動をしている最中に再会することもあります。また、国際交流では切っても切れない関係にある英語ですが、少しでも良いので毎日学習を続けると驚くほど英語力が伸びます。私は食事や歯磨き、洗濯など耳が暇な時は英語のラジオを骨伝導イヤホンで聞いています。文法が正しい英語の文章を空で言う練習もし、食事中には英語の本も読んでいます。



渡邊 心 (Shin WATANABE)

高校生派遣プログラム (日本大学三島高等学校)

- プログラム実施時期: 2017年3月8日-3月15日
- 参加当時の属性: 高校生
- 現在の属性: 社会人
- 所属先: 株式会社静岡新聞社・静岡放送株式会社
- SNSアカウント: X

■ KAKEHASHIでの思い出

高校1, 2年次にホームステイを受け入れ、高校2年次にアメリカへ訪問させていただきました。訪米時、ホームステイを受け入れた留学生と会うことができました。個人での留学プログラムでは実現しえない交換留学の魅力を実感し、カケハシ・プロジェクトの他とは違った魅力を感じ心から感動しました。訪米時には、訪問先の学校等において、日本の魅力に関するプレゼンテーションを行いました。プレゼンテーションにあたり、私たち自身が日本の魅力を深く調べ、日本の魅力を再発見する契機となりました。たとえば「ディスペンバック」は日本の技術であること、日本のアニメが海外で大きく評価されていること、新幹線の揺れの少なさは日本の技術によって支えられていることなど、自分たちがこれまで生活を送る中で意識せずに享受している便利さや素敵さが日本独自のものだということが分かり、日本の魅力を再発見することができました。これは海外向けの発表のみならず、日本国内でも発信していくべき重要なテーマだと感じました。

■ 参加後の活動や近況

そうした日本の魅力を広めたいということも決め手の1つとなり、大学では新聞学科でジャーナリズムについて学修し、現在は新聞・放送業界で働いています。また、カケハシ・プロジェクトのフォローアップ事業にも参加をし、国際交流で学んだことを、皆様がどのようにして活かされているかについて学び続けることを意識しています。カケハシ・プロジェクトでは様々な国を訪問された方がいらっしゃるため、日本にいながら様々な経験を聞かせていただくことできることは大きな強みだと感じています。今後もカケハシ・プロジェクトでの経験や繋がりを活かしていきたいと考えています。

■ 未来へのメッセージ

新型コロナウイルス禍からはや5年以上。グローバル化が叫ばれていた社会から一転、感染症防止等の観点から排他的な言動が氾濫するようになったと感じています。私が国際交流で学んだことの1つは、自国の魅力を知るためには、自国のことを発信してその反応に接したりする中で、他者の目を通じて自己を知ることができるのが大きな強みになることだと考えています。今後国際化の中で、今回の感染症のような様々な課題に直面することがあるかと思っています。その乗り越え方を模索するには、国際交流での経験が不可欠なのではないかと考えます。まずは難しく考えずに、ぜひ国際交流を経験し、そこで得た経験を人生の糧にしていただけたら嬉しいです。





川又 湧也 (Yuya KAWAMATA)

イノウエ・プログラム派遣 (福島大学)

- プログラム実施時期: 2018年2月19日-2月26日
- 参加当時の属性: 大学生
- 現在の属性: 社会人
- 所属先: 筑波大学 (福島県立南会津高等学校所属)
- SNSアカウント: [Instagram](#)

■ KAKEHASHIでの思い出

私はカケハシ・プロジェクトに参加したことで多くの繋がりを得ることができました。私の大学は福島県にある国立大学であり、その当時福島は震災による原子力発電所の事故の影響で風評被害を受け、多くの海外の人にとって危険な場所だとみなされていました。そのため、私たちはその風評被害をできるだけ払拭して多くの海外の人に福島を訪れてもらえるように、テキサスにある2つの大学で福島の復興に関する発表を英語で行いました。とても緊張したことを今でも鮮明に覚えています。その発表をきっかけに学生たちは福島に興味を持ってくれたり、それをきっかけにSNSで繋がった学生たちがその年の夏に別のプログラムで福島に来てくれたりしたときはとても嬉しかったです。



■ 参加後の活動や近況

その後、私はカケハシ・プロジェクトで培った英語力と発信力を活かして教育の力で福島の復興に貢献したいという想いから福島の高校で英語教員になりました。そこでも、その当時仲良くなった友達がオンラインで私の授業をサポートしてることがあります。現在は、もっと英語教育について勉強したいという想いから大学院で研究に励んでいます。これも、カケハシ・プロジェクトで出会った友達から大学院への進学を勧められて希望した道です。カケハシ・プロジェクトは私にたくさんのつながりを与え、そして様々な選択肢を見せてくれたかけがえのない時間でした。

■ 未来へのメッセージ

近年、日本では日本人ファーストという動きが加速しているように見えます。確かに、グローバル化の急速な発展によって、これまで先住民が築き上げてきた日本の歴史や文化が蔑ろにされてしまう恐れはあるかもしれません。しかし、グローバル化において大切なことは対話であり、それが国際交流だと思います。それぞれの歴史・文化で育った者同士が交流し合うことで、従来の歴史や文化に加えて新しい歴史や文化が生まれてくるのではないのでしょうか。そのため、国際交流では、時にはぶつかり合うことを恐れずに率直に対話をするのが大切だと思います。私自身、カケハシ・プロジェクトで出会った友達の多くが年上だったこともあり、たくさんのことを教わりました。将来、「国際交流」という言葉が「交流」と同義に扱われるくらいに、日本人と外国人という隔たりのない率直な「交流」が進んでいくといいなと思います。



My KAKEHASHI Stories

- Outbound Programs FY2022・FY2023-

- 角田 喜彦 (Kiyoshi KAKUDA) ---高校生派遣プログラム (福山市立福山高等学校)
- 安次富 長徒 (Taketo ASHITOMI) ---沖縄プログラム派遣 (那覇国際高等学校)



角田 喜彦 (Kiyoshi KAKUDA)

高校生派遣プログラム (福山市立福山高等学校)

- プログラム実施時期: 2023年3月15日-3月22日
- 参加当時の属性: 社会人
- 現在の属性: 社会人
- 所属先: 福山市立福山高等学校
- SNSアカウント: [Instagram](#)

■ KAKEHASHIでの思い出

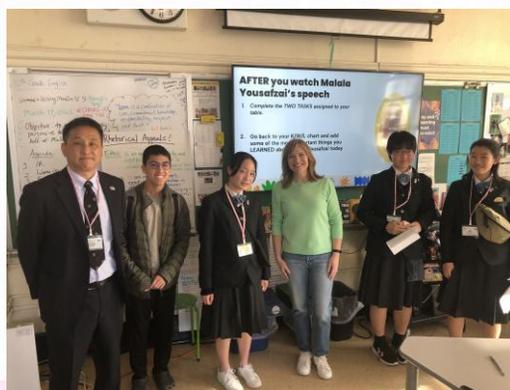
福山高校がカケハシ・プロジェクトと出会ったのは、2019年のことです。福山市からの依頼で、ハワイ・オアフ島にあるジェームズ・キャンベル高校の生徒たちを受け入れました。本校生徒がボディとして付き添い、授業への参加や書道体験、少林寺拳法の体験などを通して、日本の高校生活を体験してもらいました。歓迎プログラムでは、ハワイの生徒たちがフラダンスを披露し、言葉を越えた笑顔と感動が学校を包み込みました。この短い一日で、互いの文化を尊重し合い、心を通わせる貴重な体験となりました。しかしその直後、世界は新型コロナウイルスのパンデミックにより、国際交流の機会を失いました。再開を待つ中、2022年には福山高校がニューヨーク派遣プログラムに応募し幸運にも当選しました。9名の生徒が渡航し、イーストサイド・コミュニティ高校との交流や国連本部、日本総領事館、日系企業、ウォール街、グランドゼロの視察などを通して、グローバルな視野を大きく広げることができました。現地で異文化に直接触れ、国際社会で求められる多様性や協働の重要性を肌で感じると同時に、自分自身の可能性を深く考える機会を得ました。

■ 参加後の活動や近況

翌2023年には、ニューヨークの生徒さんたちが福山高校を訪問しました。本校生徒の家庭にホームステイし、地域の文化や人々の温かさを肌で感じてもらいました。わずか数日間の滞在でしたが、涙ながらに別れを惜しみ、国境を越えた友情の芽生えを強く感じました。さらに2024年には、アメリカ・ラスベガスのセンテニアルハイスクールとオンライン交流を実施しました。ZOOMを通じて、動画やスライドでお互いの学校や地域の紹介を行った後、個別での会話を楽しみました。

■ 未来へのメッセージ

カケハシ・プロジェクトを通じて得られたつながりは、単なる国際交流にとどまらず、互いの違いを尊重し合い、世界に目を向ける心を育む教育の一環となっています。本校にとって、これまでの経験はかけがえのない宝物です。今後もこの「架け橋」が、未来を担う人材の新たな出会いと成長の場となることを心から願っています。オンライン交流では直接会えないもどかしさはありませんでしたが、互いの生活や文化に触れることで心の距離は縮まり、次回はぜひ福山に来てもらうか、本校が訪問できることを切に願う交流となりました。



安次富 長徒 (Taketo ASHITOMI)

沖縄プログラム派遣 (那覇国際高等学校)

- プログラム実施時期: 2023年10月25日-11月1日
- 参加当時の属性: 高校生
- 現在の属性: 大学生
- 所属先: 立教大学

■ KAKEHASHIでの思い出

カケハシ・プロジェクトを通じて、アメリカの文化や生活を肌で感じられたことは今でも鮮明に覚えています。テレビや映画で見ていた世界が目の前に広がっていたこと、そして日本では決して見られない景色を実際に目にしたことは、私の人生において大きな経験となりました。また、ホストファミリーや訪問校での交流の中で、日本の風景や文化、生活様式に目を輝かせながら驚き、「日本に行きたい」と口々に言ってくれたことが、最も心に残る思い出です。この経験を通して、日本の素晴らしさを改めて実感しました。帰国後もオンライン通話などを通じて交流を続け、実際に滞在先で仲良くなった生徒が沖縄に旅行で訪れてくれたこともありました。わずか一週間のプロジェクトが、かけがえのない出会いを生んでくれたのだと改めて感じています。

■ 参加後の活動や近況

現在は大学で政治を学びながら、イベントでの通訳として活動する機会をいただいています。また、各国の若者が集うユース外交の場にも参加し、英語を駆使しながら議論や交流を行っています。こうした活動に積極的に取り組めるようになった背景には、カケハシ・プロジェクトを通じて英語でのやり取りに自信を持ったことがあります。現地での会話やオンラインでの継続的な交流が、私にとって大きな原動力となりました。ホストファミリーや現地の友人とのつながりも今なお続いており、来年には再会の予定もあります。カケハシ・プロジェクトでの一週間は、私の人生におけるかけがえのない体験であり、将来のキャリアを考える原点となりました。

■ 未来へのメッセージ

カケハシ・プロジェクトは一週間という短期間のプログラムですが、その中で全力で楽しみ、積極的に交流することで、一生忘れられない経験となります。私自身、異国での生活や交流を通じて多くを学び、帰国後もSNSを通じて友情を育むことができました。慣れない環境に不安を感じることもあるかもしれませんが、一步踏み出す勇気があれば、最終日にはかけがえのない思い出と人とのつながりが残ります。未来の参加者の皆さんも、すべての出会いに感謝と敬意を込め、このプログラムを人生のターニングポイントにしてほしいと思います。



My KAKEHASHI Stories

- Outbound Programs FY2024-

- 奥灘 萌 (Moe OKUNADA) ---カナダ大学生派遣プログラム
- 大塚 せな (Sena OTSUKA) ---イノウエ・プログラム派遣 (上智大学)
- 戸塚 渉太 (Shota TOTSUKA) ---イノウエ・プログラム派遣 (上智大学)
- 安永 恵一 (Keiichi YASUNAGA) ---アメリカで沖縄の未来を考える (TOFU) プログラム
- 永木 貴翔 (Takato NAGAKI) ---アメリカボウル派遣プログラム
- 森 孟子 (Mone MORI) ---アメリカボウル派遣プログラム



奥灘 萌 (Moe OKUNADA)

カナダ大学生派遣プログラム

- プログラム実施時期: 2025年3月2日-3月9日
- 参加当時の属性: 大学生
- 現在の属性: 大学生
- 所属先: 明治大学

■ KAKEHASHIでの思い出

カケハシ・プロジェクトを通して、言語学習の重要性と同時に、言語を超えた心のつながりの大切さを実感しました。プログラムは全て英語で行われ、日本でも英語やフランス語を学んでいましたが、現地では会話のスピードや語彙力に圧倒され、自分の思いをうまく表現できないもどかしさを感じました。その経験から、国境を越えた人とのつながりには言語学習が欠かせないことを痛感しました。オンタリオ州副総督エディス・デュモン氏への表敬訪問では、彼女が「人は皆学習者です」と語ってくださり、その言葉が強く心に残りました。訪問の最後に、私は専攻しているフランス語で感謝を伝えました。拙いフランス語でしたが、副総督が笑顔で応えてくださり、言葉の上手さよりも「伝えようとする気持ち」こそが心を動かすのだと感じました。この経験を通して、学び続けることの大切さ、そして人と人を結ぶのは言葉以上の想いだということを改めて実感しました。現地での交流を通じてトロント大学の学生や大学院生、そしてカケハシ・プロジェクトで日本を訪れたアルムナイとの再会を通して、様々な背景を持つ人々と交流する機会に恵まれました。お互いの文化や生活、将来について語り合う中で、言語は思いを繋ぐ大切な手段であると同時に、「相手を知りたい」「仲良くなりたい」という気持ちこそが心を通わせる原点だと感じました。また、日本の文化やアニメ、日本語に強い関心を持ち、真剣に学んでいる学生が多いことに感動しました。自国の魅力が他国の若者に愛されていることを誇りに思うとともに、自分自身もより一層、異文化理解や語学の学びを深めたいという意欲が高まりました。

■ 参加後の活動や近況

カケハシ・プロジェクトを通して、多くの出会いと学びを得ました。参加当時は将来について明確な目標を持っていませんでしたが、実際に海外を訪れ、日本と諸外国の文化や社会の違い、そしてそれぞれの魅力や課題を肌で感じたことで、自分の視野が大きく広がりました。この経験をきっかけに、国や文化の違いを越えて人と人をつなぎ、国際社会の課題解決に貢献したいという思いが強まりました。将来的には、国連などの国際機関で活躍し、世界に架け橋をかけられるような人になりたいと考えています。カケハシ・プロジェクトは、その第一歩となる貴重な経験でした。

■ 未来へのメッセージ

カケハシ・プロジェクトに代表生として選出いただき、かけがえのない思い出と学びの機会を与えてくださったJICE、APF Canadaをはじめとする多くの関係者の皆さま、そしてともに過ごした仲間や現地で出会ったすべての方々に、心から感謝しています。帰国後も、日本のカケハシ・プロジェクト参加メンバーとは連絡を取り合い、時には直接会って交流を続けています。また、カナダで出会ったトロント大学の学生が夏に来日した際には、日本で再会することもできました。このように、カケハシ・プロジェクトを通じて築いた絆が今も続き、互いに良い刺激を与え合っていることをとても嬉しく思います。私にとってこの経験は、人生の新たな扉を開くきっかけとなりました。これからも、このプロジェクトが参加者一人ひとりの未来への“KAKEHASHI”となっていくことを願っています。





大塚 せな (Sena OTSUKA)

イノウエ・プログラム派遣 (上智大学)

- プログラム実施時期: 2025年3月12日-3月19日
- 参加当時の属性: 大学生
- 現在の属性: 大学生
- 所属先: 上智大学

■ KAKEHASHIでの思い出

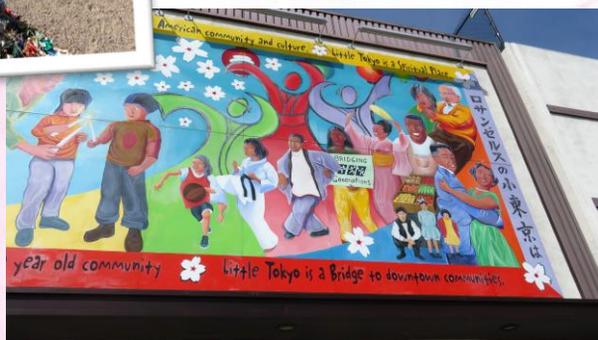
2025年にカケハシ・プロジェクトのイノウエ・プログラムでアメリカ・カリフォルニア州に派遣されました。現地では、在ロサンゼルス日本国総領事館、ハリウッドに位置するJAPAN HOUSE、第二次世界大戦中日系アメリカ人が強制収容された、マンザナー強制収容所などを訪れた他、現地の学生と交流をしました。本プログラムは、対日理解促進だけではなく、日本で生まれ育った私が、アメリカで生きていた、また今もなお生活している日系人がどのような歩みをしてきたのかを知る機会でもありました。現在日本ではアメリカの文化が強く浸透しており、アメリカでは日本文化が人気を博しています。しかし、この滞在で気付いたことは、先人が想像を絶する苦労を超えた結果、わずか数十年で作り上げてくれた関係性ということでした。参加していなければお互いを知らずにいた、友人、引率の方々に出会うこともでき、わずか一週間のプログラムでしたが、ここでは書ききれない程の、生涯忘れたくないかけがえのない思い出ができました。

■ 参加後の活動や近況

プログラム後、日系アメリカ人への関心が更に深まり、日本で日系アメリカ人に関するイベントに参加したり、文献を読み進めたりしました。また、関心は「移民・ナショナルアイデンティティ」にまで広がり、現在フランスに留学中である為、そこからポーランドへ行き、アウシュビッツ強制収容所を訪れました。かつて苦手科目だった歴史が、今になりようやく自ら学びを深めたい科目になりました。自分自身が、今フランスで外国人として過ごしているの、この関心について知識や考えを広げられるよう、本プログラムでの経験を思い出しながら過ごしています。将来、日本の文化を沢山の方に知ってもらい、海外の文化を知ることで、自分の世界が広がる喜びを感じてもらえる職業に就くことが夢です。

■ 未来へのメッセージ

一概に国際交流と言っても、その方法は数えきれない程存在します。だからこそ、自分が行っていることが正しいのか不安になる時があると思いますが、正しい・効率の良い国際交流は存在しないはず。思いがけないきっかけが、その後の自身の人生を信じられない程豊かにしてくれることもあります。自分が興味があること、今まで興味の無かったことにも貪欲に学ぶ姿勢を忘れないで欲しいです。留学生活で、今まさに言語の壁に押し潰されそうな毎日を過ごしていますが、決して、国際交流の楽しさだけは忘れず、この壁を壊す努力をしながら自分が知らない世界中のことをもっと深く学んでいきたいです。





戸塚 渉太 (Shota TOTSUKA)

イノウエ・プログラム派遣 (上智大学)

- プログラム実施時期: 2025年3月12日-3月19日
- 参加当時の属性: 大学生
- 現在の属性: 大学生
- 所属先: 上智大学
- SNSアカウント: [Instagram](#)

■ KAKEHASHIでの思い出

私は、上智大学の学生として2025年3月に実施されたカケハシ・プロジェクトのイノウエ・プログラムに参加し、カリフォルニアで歴史教育と文化交流を経験しました。このプログラムを通じて得た学びは、「人との学び」「文化との学び」「歴史との学び」という三つにまとめることができます。まず、人との学びでは、一緒に渡航した仲間や現地の大学生たちと異なる学習環境の中で、共通する課題に向き合い、それぞれの専門分野の知見を活かしながら協働的に問題解決に取り組むことができました。次に、文化との学びでは、日本とは異なる食生活や生活習慣に触れ、環境の違いを肌で感じながら多様な価値観が共存するアメリカを学びました。最後に、歴史との学びでは、日系アメリカ人のルーツをたどる中で、彼らが歩んできた歴史や、そこから築かれた日米関係の背景を学び、今の社会や国際関係にどのようなつながっているのかを考える機会となりました。

■ 参加後の活動や近況

私はこのプログラムを通じて、学生である自分自身も、国際交流や日本発信を通じた民間外交の一端を担っているという自覚と責任を持つことができました。私にとって外交とは、国境を越えて信頼関係を築くものであり、その根底には「友情」があると考えています。日本国総領事館の訪問や、現地の学生、教員との交流は、まさにその実践の場であると感じました。一方で、日本の若者世代が外交を身近に感じる機会はまだ少なく、関心を持ちにくい環境があることに課題意識を抱いています。そこで帰国後に、若い世代が国際社会について主体的に学べる環境づくりを目指し、TICAD9の国際会議において、公式テーマ別サイドイベントとして開催されたワークショップの企画に携わりました。今後も、若い世代が外交について自ら考え、関心を持つきっかけを広げていけるよう、活動を続けていきたいと考えています。

■ 未来へのメッセージ

未来の参加者の皆さんへのメッセージとして、海外に対する“親近感”を持って渡航に臨んでほしいと思います。確かに、日本とアメリカ(海外)では生活環境や価値観の違いが大きく、理解したり、慣れたりするまでには時間がかかるかもしれませんが、しかし、困ったときに手を差し伸べてくれる人々の温かさや、お互いを理解し合おうとする思いやりは、国や文化を越えて共通しているものです。すべての経験が楽しく理想的であるとは限りませんが、辛い時にも支え合いながら歩むことで、世界の絆はより強くなっていくのではないのでしょうか。私自身も、皆さんと共に日本を発信し、日米関係のカケハシとなれるよう、これからも学び続けていきたいと思っています。



安永 恵一 (Keiichi YASUNAGA)

アメリカで沖縄の未来を考える (TOFU) プログラム

- プログラム実施時期: 2025年3月19日-3月26日
- 参加当時の属性: 高校生
- 現在の属性: 高校生
- 所属先: 沖縄県立開邦高等学校
- SNSアカウント: [Facebook](#)

■ KAKEHASHIでの思い出

私は2025年3月、カケハシ・プロジェクト「アメリカで沖縄の未来を考える(TOFU)」プログラムに参加しました。沖縄県内から集まった高校生・大学生、計30名で、東京・ワシントンD.C.・ニューヨークを1週間かけて訪問するという、非常に密度の高いプロジェクトでした。ワシントンD.C.では現地の高校を訪れ、日本や沖縄の文化を紹介しました。クイズやダンスを交えたプレゼンテーションは大いに盛り上がり、生徒たちとはすぐに打ち解けることができました。校内を案内してもらったり、一緒にTikTokを撮ったりする中で、文化の壁を越えて心を通じ合わせる事ができました。また、1週間を通して日米の政府機関や関係団体を訪問し、政治家や各分野で活躍する方々と直接意見を交わす機会を得ることができました。日本、そして沖縄とアメリカを結ぶ人々の言葉は、国際社会の中で日本や沖縄がどのような役割を果たしているのかについて深く考えさせられるきっかけとなりました。特に印象に残っているのは、沖縄と米軍基地の関係について、さまざまな立場や考え方があったことです。「第一次列島線を構成するうえで沖縄は欠かせない」と語る人もいれば、「地域住民との協調があってこそ基地は機能する」という意見もありました。安全保障、地域社会、経済、環境などどの視点に着目した意見にも一理があり、賛成・反対という単純な二項対立では語れない複雑な現実を目の当たりにしました。この1週間を通して、異なる背景を持つ人々の意見を知る中で、「沖縄の未来をどう考えるべきか」を改めて見つめ直すことができました。自分自身の視点を問い直し、より広い視野で物事を捉える力を育むことができた、かけがえのない経験となりました。

■ 参加後の活動や近況

カケハシ・プロジェクトでの経験は、私の進路に大きな影響を与えました。プログラムを通して外交という分野に強い関心を持ち、将来は外交官として国際社会に貢献したいという目標が明確になったからです。プログラムに参加したことで、実際に外交の世界に触れることができたとともに、1週間同行してくださった外交官の方から直接たくさんのお話を伺うことができ、国と国をつなぐ仕事のやりがいや責任の重さを学ぶことができました。相手国との信頼関係を築くために、言語だけでなく文化や歴史を理解する姿勢が重要であるという言葉が特に印象に残っています。またプログラム終了後、参加者の中から選ばれた4名の一人として続けている「日米交流学生大使」の活動では、沖縄県内の米軍基地を訪問したり、ボランティアや打ち合わせに参加したりすることで、文化や国境をこえて協力しあうことの価値を肌で実感することができています。現在、高校最終学年の私は、カケハシ・プロジェクトで明確になった夢を実現するために、国際教養学部への進学を目指して日々努力を重ねています。カケハシ・プロジェクトは、将来の目標を形づくる大きな転機となり、本当に参加して良かったと思います。

■ 未来へのメッセージ

私が考える国際交流の真の価値は、「当たり前を知れること」にあります。国の外に出て、海外と日本を比較したり、外国の人々の考え方に触れたりすることで、新たな視点から日本や地元、そして自分自身を見つめ直すことができます。その中で、これまで気づかなかった当たり前の日常の中に素晴らしさを再発見することができるのです。私自身、カケハシ・プロジェクトに参加したことで、沖縄、そして日本の魅力や課題をこれまでとは異なる角度から考えるようになりました。異なる文化や価値観に触れたことが、より広い視野で考え、意見を持つことにつながりました。私はこれからも多くの人々と関わり合いながら、新しい視点を柔軟に吸収し、自分なりの考えを確立していきたいと思っています。





永木 貴翔 (Takato NAGAKI)

アメリカボウル派遣プログラム

- プログラム実施時期: 2025年3月20日-3月27日
- 参加当時の属性: 大学生
- 現在の属性: 大学生
- 所属先: 横浜国立大学大学院
- SNSアカウント: [LinkedIn](#)

■ KAKEHASHIでの思い出

高校生9名の引率者として、そして日米協会のインターン生として大学4年生のころ2025年3月のカケハシ・プロジェクト アメリカボウル派遣プログラムへ参加しました！ほかの都市への渡米経験はあったものの、舞台はなんとランプ2.0が始まったわずか2カ月後の首都ワシントンD.C.という素晴らしい時期でした。政治に関するデモ活動であったり、施設の突然の運用停止であったりまさに政策の実行の早さを目で見て実感してきたのはもちろんのこと、議会や国務省で議員や職員の方々の話をお伺いした時に感じた政治の混乱は非常に印象に残っております。また一緒に過ごした高校生の知識の深さには大変驚かされました。さすがアメリカボウルwinnersでした。このような素敵な仲間たちと過ごし、そして現在も連絡を取り合えることを大変うれしく思います。このような主催をいただいた日米協会事務局の皆様、本当にありがとうございました。そしてこのような機会を下さったJICEの方々、外務省をはじめとする後援団体の方々、現地での献身的なサポートを提供していただいたLaurasian Institutionへ御礼申し上げます。

■ 未来へのメッセージ

異文化との対話を通じて自らの立場を相対化し、既存の枠組みを超えた創造的思考を育むことに本質があるように感じます。そのためには言語や文化の違いを障壁ではなく豊かさと捉える柔軟な姿勢と未知への好奇心を学びの糧に変えることが重要ではないでしょうか。そこから始め、いずれは国境を越えた新たな共創が生まれるのです！





森 孟子 (Mone MORI)

アメリカボウル派遣プログラム

- プログラム実施時期: 2025年3月20日-3月27日
- 参加当時の属性: 高校生
- 現在の属性: 高校生
- 所属先: 西大和学園高等学校
- SNSアカウント: [Instagram](#)

■ KAKEHASHIでの思い出

2025年秋、政権交代を経て、日本外交は新たな局面を迎えている。安全保障、技術協力、アジア太平洋の秩序形成——議論は尽きず、10年後、20年後の日本の立ち位置を考えずにはいられない。こうした問いを自分事として捉えるきっかけくれたのが、カケハシ・プロジェクトだった。出発前、私は日本の存在感の低下を思い、「アメリカとの差は埋まらない」とどこか醒めた気持ちで考えていた。しかし国務省を訪れ、上院議員の方々と対話するなかで、その思い込みは良い意味で崩れた。たしかに日米には非対称性がある。だがアメリカは日本を「戦略的パートナー」として重んじ、敬意をもって向き合っている。その背景には、地政学では割り切れない深い信頼があるのだろう。今回の訪問で、それが先人たちの誠実な積み重ねの賜物なのだと実感した。忘れがたい駐米大使の言葉がある。「外交は政治の舞台だけで行われるものではない。民間の、あなた方一人一人が日本の顔なのだ。」国家の名誉や信頼は政治家や外交官だけでなく、一学生の態度にも及ぶ。背筋が伸びる思いがした。自分たちの世代は何を積み重ねていけるのか。激動する時代の中で、先人とは異なるかたちで日本の可能性を再定義し、新たな存在意義を示していく必要がある。求められるのは、語学や知識よりも、「相互理解と対話」に根ざした視座の転換だ。日本の若者がアメリカで、アメリカの若者が日本で活躍する。そんな創造的に相補いあうパートナーシップの一端を支えられる人間になりたい。その第一歩として、いま私はStanford e-Japanでアメリカの制度・文化・歴史を学び、その視点から日本を見つめ直す試みを始めている。

■ 未来へのメッセージ

異なる価値観に触れることで、自分が立っている場所が相対化され、世界は想像していたよりずっと広くて近いものなのだと実感できる。カケハシ・プロジェクトは、幼少期から勉強勉強の狭い世界にいた私が国際社会に目を向け、自分なりの将来を考えるきっかけをくれました。前に進む勇気をくれました。得難い成長の機会を下さった協会の方々には感謝の気持ちしかありません。これからの参加を考えている皆さん、どうかこのチャンスを逃さず、新しい世界へ、全力で飛び込んでいってください！



My KAKEHASHI Stories

- Messages from Inbound Program Alumni-

- Sammi Yang
- Caroline Tremblay
- Ellison Tatsch
- Janiel G. Cirino Echavarría
- Noah Seiji Haramoto
- Adrian Edwards
- Clarke Peyton Hamilton
- Julian Kenzo Nakanishi-Rodriguez
- Marvin Vinluan
- Naoko Sugano
- Jordan Logan Evangelister
- Andrew Smith
- Meleia Cullman Rose
- Alex Meng
- Chikara Persaud
- Brett Lesterjoe S Cudo
- Gabriel Sillador
- Lemuel Sun
- Amelia Gipp
- Elana Ho
- Raelie Grayson
- Emily Nagamoto
- Haruka FUJIWARA



Carnegie Mellon University / Citibank

Sammi Yang

During my KAKEHASHI Project trip, we did a homestay in Semboku City in Akita Prefecture, and our delegation was so moved by the hospitality and warmth of our host families that we left with teary eyes after just a three-day stay. Doing a homestay in rural Japan was definitely out of my comfort zone, but it was one of the best decisions I've ever made. Not only did I get to experience the beauty of Akita, but I was also inspired by Semboku City's commitment to green tourism. I hope to revisit Japan many times again, whether as a tourist, student, or working professional.



University of Puerto Rico (Rio Piedras Campus)

Caroline Tremblay

My experience in Japan will always be one I remember. Truly a one of a kind experience where I made long lasting friendships and got to learn about so many things. I wish I could relive it all again. The food, landmarks, and the people we met were very kind and beautiful. I'm grateful we had the opportunity to learn so much firsthand about the technological advances Japan has to offer and all the ways they are incorporated into the day to day to help people's lives be that much better. From Puerto Rico to Japan, a big hug, and I hope we keep learning from each other.



Fredericksburg High School

Ellison Tatsch

Hello everyone! I'm Ellie and I participated in the KAKEHASHI Project in 2024. This was an amazing experience and truly life changing. My group went to Japan for a week and visited Tokyo and Fukuoka. We were able to stay with a host family, visit a local high school, walk the streets of Tokyo, and see another side of the world. If I had to say something to future KAKEHASHI Project participants, I would tell them to try everything. Japan is incredibly innovative and has many things that we don't have here in the states. So take this opportunity to try everything!



University of Puerto Rico (Rio Piedras Campus)

Janiel G. Cirino Echavarría

Participating in this project has allowed me to experience a part of the world most in my community can only imagine what it's like. Seeing and experiencing Japan for myself, guided by this wonderful team, and learning the culture, customs, lifestyle, and technology has left me inspired. I intend to return in the future to pursue higher education or a proper, professional, scientific research and employment opportunities.



Paramount Studios

Noah Seiji Haramoto

"I hope that one day, Japan can be a second home to you." Words that have stuck with me from my time in the KAKEHASHI Project. The program truly was a once in a lifetime experience that I think everyone should participate in. From the exclusive tours to our homestays, there aren't many other opportunities in which you can indulge in Japanese culture and customs. However, the best part of the whole experience was the people I met and befriended along the way. Sharing our interests and learning together really helped connect us further and deeper to our culture and Japan itself.



University of Puerto Rico (Rio Piedras Campus)

Adrian Edwards

Based on my own experience in the KAKEHASHI Project, I think the best advice I could give to future participants in international exchange is to just be curious. See everything as an opportunity to learn, to grow, and to make progress towards your international exchange goals. For example, if your goal is to practice and improve your Japanese language skills, don't be afraid to ask questions and to learn from the mistakes you make while speaking the language. For me, the KAKEHASHI Project provided many such opportunities, which were even more fun to learn from by going into it with a curious mindset, eager to learn.



Loyola Marymount University

Clarke Peyton Hamilton

This was a beautiful experience of exchange to be a part of. Not only was I able to learn more about Japanese culture by having conversations of resiliency and immersive cultural experiences in Japan and the U.S., but I was also able to develop an understanding of myself and the significance of such cross-cultural connections. Thank you, KAKEHASHI Project, for allowing me the opportunity to expand my perspective and encouraging me to continue building bridges.



California State University Monterey Bay

Julian Kenzo Nakanishi-Rodriguez

My KAKEHASHI Project trip was filled with memorable and exciting new experiences from having Natto for breakfast with my unforgettably kind and welcoming homestay family, to belting out Taylor Swift songs in a Karaoke bar with fellow participants. Through KAKEHASHI Project, I learned so much more about Japanese culture and history while exploring places like Tokyo and Fukuoka, and getting to know locals such as my homestay family and Japanese college students we visited. It encouraged me to participate more in my local Japanese American community. I have no doubt that future participants will have a similarly meaningful and impactful experience.



College Park High School

Jordan Logan Evangelister

KAKEHASHI Project has changed the lives of so many, mine included. KAKEHASHI Project was actually my first time going to Japan! We visited so many places, learned so many things, got to meet and speak with people from all walks of life, making genuine bridges and connections between cultures and peoples. I have since visited Japan many times, hosted Japanese exchange students here in America, and even lived in Japan for a short time, getting to visit my friends and exchange students in their homes in Japan! To this day I still keep up my studies and interests in Japanese, still have those connections with friends, and am building towards achieving my dream of writing Manga and working in Japan. Many of us alumni are still young, still chasing our dreams and building our careers and relationships. But I believe that as more and more time passes, we will see even more of the impacts this amazing program has had, in ways we couldn't have imagined. And continue seeing just how important and world changing the experience really was. Everyday, I'm just thankful to have been a part of this amazing experience!! Thank you JICE, KAKEHASHI Project, and everyone for all you do, have done, and will continue to do! It's truly an honor.



Binghamton University

Marvin Vinluan

My KAKEHASHI Project exchange visit helped introduce me to people, places, and experiences in Japan that I would never have thought to pursue on my own as a traveler. I had been to Meiji Jingu shrine before as a visitor, but our KAKEHASHI group was able to participate in the indoor 'Kigansai' service, which was totally new to me. After returning home, the KAKEHASHI Project alumni events, both online and in-person, have allowed me to connect with many great alumni and learn from craftspeople, local representatives, and others in the spirit of cultural exchange. I look forward to future exchange participants making their own unique memories and connections with the help of KAKEHASHI Project.



US Government

Andrew Smith

What can I say to convey the KAKEHASHI Project's meaning to me more than that nearly eight years later, through five moves and three cars on two continents, the good luck Taiko charm I made with my homestay group still hangs from my rearview mirror. This program was and is the experience of a lifetime. From the initial orientation to the alumni events around the world, KAKEHASHI Project provides its members with so many opportunities to engage, learn, and be a positive voice about a place we all love so much. I am lucky and proud to be part of it.



Davis Senior High School

Naoko Sugano

I was fortunate to participate in the KAKEHASHI Project with my 7 students in November 2023. The program was very well organized and provided us with a variety of educational and informative activities through which we experienced many traditional and modern aspects of Japan. I especially appreciate the opportunity to learn about not only the history and culture of Okinawa but also people's efforts to preserve their beautiful ocean. One of my most valuable memories is gathering trash on a beach after listening to how the ocean environment has been damaged and what we could do to improve it. I am certain that these experiences have inspired my students to grow to be culturally aware global citizens.



Government employee

Meleia Cullman Rose

The magic of experiencing Japan from an insider perspective, has really stayed with me. I remain grateful and awed by my experience. I feel connected to Japan in deep, meaningful, ways. Thank you so much!



University of British Columbia

Alex Meng

Congratulations on getting here! You've probably already heard lots of stories and useful advice, so I'll just say this: Please enjoy every moment! Take it all in, learn as much as you can, and make the most of this experience. My time in the KAKEHASHI Project was truly special, something I don't think I'll ever experience twice. Wherever you may go, whatever you may do, I hope you come out of it with memories and valuable lessons, and that your time as a participant will be just as meaningful for you in your own way.



University of British Columbia

Gabriel Sillador

It truly was an honour to be a part of the KAKEHASHI Project, and its memories and the road that brought me there are something I always look back to when I need to remind myself on the significance of why I continue to study Japanese. So, make the most of it, as the experiences and perspective gained through international exchange are certainly both meaningful and irreplaceable!



Canada Border Services Agency

Chikara Persaud

KAKEHASHI Project opened my eyes to Japan and international cooperation. Regarding the former, I experienced a completely new culture and way of living. Not to mention all the great food we were treated to, especially during my lovely homestay in Yonezawa. Regarding the latter, in times when the world seems divided, the importance of such exchange projects in creating bridges between cultures and persons is highlighted. This has encouraged me to look for opportunities to travel or work abroad to understand the world at large further. KAKEHASHI Project is a great first or continuing step in that journey for anyone.



Byrne Creek Secondary School

Lemuel Sun

This exchange was an unforgettable experience in my life, everyone was so kind and welcoming! Being there in person to experience the culture was nothing like reading it online. Japan is stunningly beautiful like no other, I wish I could go again! If you are considering participating, I would strongly encourage you to join, this is a once in a lifetime opportunity that you absolutely cannot miss. —Love from Vancouver, I miss you Japan.



CAPREIT

Brett Lesterjoe S Cudo

Exchange projects are the most valuable experiences in your lifetime. I am so grateful for the opportunity to participate in this project and it will be something you will reflect on throughout your career. You will seek new interests in travel and share cultural experiences with people around the world. For me, KAKEHASHI Project helped me understand cultural differences, and it is the youth who come together to innovate and strengthen our diplomatic relationships. I truly enjoyed this experience and would return for another opportunity in a heartbeat. My advice to the upcoming participants: take some time for yourself to reflect and ask yourself how you can create positive change.



George Brown College

Amelia Gipp

KAKEHASHI Project is such a fun and informative trip that I think anyone interested in Japanese culture and society should try to take part in! Not only do you get to learn about Japan's past and present, but you also get the chance to meet the people and form relations with them that can last a lifetime. This is a moment in my life that I will cherish and remember for a long time to come!



Oracle

Elana Ho

Five years ago, I participated in a Japanese speech contest, and I had no idea how much it would change my life. I earned the opportunity to join the KAKEHASHI Project: to travel to Japan, to learn about Japanese culture and history, to share my findings with others, and to build connections with people from around the world. To future participants, I'm so excited for you to begin your journey, and I hope that your experience is as wonderful as mine. Congratulations to the KAKEHASHI Project on 10 years! May the program continue strong for many more years to come.



University of Colorado Boulder

Emily Nagamoto

With the amazing KAKEHASHI Project, I visited Tokyo and Okinawa in March, 2023. There was delicious food, interesting differences in diet, media, and marketing, and visits with various ministers about Japan-America ties. My ultimate favorite part was being able to meet other Japanese-American youth and go through these experiences together. Visiting Japan for the first time was a significant moment, and I'm excited to go back to see my dad's hometown and my grandmother's favorite places. I am incredibly grateful to JAACL and JICE. Any and all Japanese-American youth should apply!! I still feel like a KAKEHASHI today.



Northeastern State University

Raelie Grayson

The KAKEHASHI and US-Japan Council programs allowed me to experience a once in a lifetime opportunity. It was a trip of many firsts for me when my group traveled abroad and I still treasure the time I spent in Japan. Being able to travel and engage a different culture really does allow you to put things into perspective and I came away with a better understanding of what kind of person I am and what I'm capable of. I had a blast in both Tokyo and Sapporo. I cannot recommend the program enough and I highly encourage those interested to go for it.



Curtis Senior High School

Haruka FUJIWARA

カケハシプロジェクト10周年おめでとうございます！カケハシプロジェクトへの参加は、私にとって忘れられない貴重な経験となりました。教員として、生徒たちに日本語学習と日本文化の魅力を伝える日々の中で、自らが日本の社会や人々の温かさに触れ、直接交流を体験できたことは大きな財産です。プログラムで得た学びや出会いは、今も私の教育活動の原動力となり、生徒たちの夢を支える力にもなっています。10周年という素晴らしい節目を迎え、これからも多くの人々がこの架け橋を渡り、相互理解と友情の輪を広げていくことを心から願っています。



My KAKEHASHI Stories

- Messages from Outbound Program Alumni-

- 佐桑 誠
- 坂本 万里
- 早川 明伽
- 立石 祐美子
- 安西 志帆
- 下地 李佳



カンヌライオンズ

佐桑 誠
Makoto SAKUWA

カケハシ・プロジェクトを通じて出会った仲間との時間は、今も自分の原点として心に残っています。異なる背景を持つ人々が互いの価値観を尊重しながら語り合う、サンフランシスコやスタンフォードで交わした何気ない会話のひとつひとつが、今の自分を形づくっています。また、当時の仲間と10年近い時を経て交流があることは、とても貴重な財産になっています。これからも、自分自身が日米の若者が未来を語り合うきっかけであり続けたいと思うとともに、今後の参加者にも、自分の価値観を変えるような時間と仲間を見つけて欲しいと思います。



学校法人向上学園

坂本万里
Masato SAKAMOTO

2017年カケハシ・プロジェクトで、米国ニューヨーク州に団長として神奈川県立弥栄高校の生徒23名を引率しました。現在は、伊勢原市の向上学園理事としてこの経験を生かしグローバル教育の支援をしています。学園に2つの学校(向上高校と自修館中等教育学校)があり、米国コネティカット州やニュージーランド、オーストラリアの中高校と姉妹校交流が盛んに行われています。また、自修館の生徒2名(昨年度は4名)が、日本青年会議所(JC)主催のグローバルユース国連大使の、全国から選ばれた代表20名のメンバーとして、8月にドイツ・ベルリンで行われた世界会議に参加しドイツ人中高生と平和について意見交換をしています。



データアナリティクスラボ

早川 明伽
Haruka HAYAKAWA

私は2018年、高校2年生のときにカケハシ・プロジェクトに参加し、アメリカのテキサス州を訪れました。参加中に出会ったアメリカの学生とは、今でもSNSを通じて交流が続いています。さらに先日は、過去の参加者向けイベントにも参加し、多くの仲間とつながることができました。参加から数年経った今でも、国や年齢を超えた関係が続いていることに、改めてこのプロジェクトの価値を感じています。カケハシ・プロジェクトは、参加期間だけで終わらず、その後も長く続く出会いが得られる貴重な機会です。ぜひ一歩踏み出して挑戦してみてください！



関西学院大学

立石 祐美子
Yumiko TATEISHI

カケハシ・プロジェクト10周年おめでとうございます！私は約5年前引率者として参加しましたが、今でも当時の学生たちと会うほど仲良くさせてもらっています。それほどこのプロジェクトで過ごした時間は濃密で印象的で素晴らしいものでした。今後もこの国際交流プロジェクトが、多くの方にとっての転機となることを願っています。そして、参加を迷っている方や少しでも気になっている方には、私の実体験をもとに全力でおすすめしたいと思います！これからもこのプロジェクトを心より応援しております！



慶應義塾大学

安西 志帆
Shiho ANZAI

カケハシ・プロジェクトでの縁は、あなたを思いがけない良い方向に導いてくれると思います。私はプログラム参加後、トロント出身の方と仲良くなり、私が辛かった時に励ましてくれたのもその方でした。ごく自然に多様性が輝くカナダで若いうちに学ぶことは、日本の当たり前を疑い、社会を変えようとする原体験になると思います。私自身、カナダで女性の政治家の方々とお話したことは、日本政治の舞台におけるジェンダーや年齢バランスの偏りを問い直し、政治や社会について学びを深めたいと考える大きな動機になりました。これからも、多くのカケハシ・プロジェクトの方々カナダと日本、相互の文化や価値観を学び合った経験を国内外で広げていけることを祈っています。



沖縄県立宮古高等学校

下地 李佳
Rika SHIMOJI

カケハシ・プロジェクトで、自国に対する理解がより深まり、また生まれ育った沖縄の魅力を見つめ、再発見することができました。自国の魅力を改めて見つけ、新しい世界に飛び込んでみることでたくさんの素敵な価値観やご縁に出会うことができました。お互いを深く理解して愛する事でたくさんの素敵な発見と出会いがあると信じています。そのような稀有な経験を得られた事をとても嬉しく、幸せに思います。これから参加する方々には、たくさんの価値観を直接体験する事と、たくさんの素敵な出会いを是非楽しんでもらいたいです。素敵な機会をいただきありがとうございました！！

結びに

本年度、対日理解促進交流プログラム「カケハシ・プロジェクト」は10周年を迎えました。同窓生と関係機関の皆様の多彩な「ストーリー」を集め、事業の意義と成果を記録・発信するため、本デジタル記念誌を制作しました。日本と北米の人物交流のさらなる発展に、ささやかながら寄与できれば幸いです。

2015年度に始まった本事業は、米国・カナダ・日本の1万人を超える若者の相互理解を力強く推進してきました。若い世代が友情と信頼を育む営みは、ソフトパワー外交の理想形であり、国際協調への小さくも確かな灯です。

参加者は、感受性豊かな時期に異文化へ飛び込み、緊張を乗り越えた出会いを通じて大きく成長します。「人生が変わった」「進むべき道が見えた」「自国と自分のルーツを見つめ直せた」—そんな声に幾度も触れるたびに、この経験が一人ひとりの未来への原動力となっていることを実感してきました。

私自身の原点は、2015年8月、ジャパンプール高校生訪日団25名とともに広島を訪れた経験です。平和記念式典に臨み、夜には高校生たちが心を込めて作った灯籠を元安川に流しました。水面に揺れる光を見つめながら、平和への思いを自らの言葉で掴んでいく若者たちの姿に、深く胸を打たれました。

日系人青年を迎えた際には、広島・沖縄で自らのファミリー・ヒストリーやアイデンティティと向き合い、祖先の歩みと戦争の記憶、そして平和構築の象徴としてこの地を受け止めてくれました。地域の人々との対話を通じて「自分が日本と北米をつなぐ架け橋になりたい」と語る姿に胸が熱くなりました。こうした頼もしい日系人青年の存在は、国境を越えて連綿と受け継がれてきた絆と、先人たちの努力の証にほかなりません。

不確実性が増す今の時代、内向きになりがちな日本こそ、歴史に学びながら外へ目を向ける姿勢が問われます。「対立」ではなく「対話」によって生まれた友情と信頼こそ、国際間の緊張を和らげ、互いの価値を高める力を持つ—それが民間交流の本質だと信じます。壁を高くすることで守られるものより、橋を架けることで得られるものの方が、はるかに大きいはずです。この10年間、国内外すべての関係者の皆様が、出会う一人ひとりを大切に受け止め、ともに歴史を紡いでくださいました。その積み重ねこそが、一人ひとりの「ストーリー」となり、本事業のかけがえのない財産です。本記念誌を通じて日米加の若者の交流がさらに広がり、次の10年への新たな歩みを支える一冊となることを、心より願っております。

一般財団法人日本国際協力センター
国際交流部 青少年交流課長
小林 ひかり

Hikari Kobayashi
Director, Youth Exchange Division,
Japan International Cooperation Center (JICE)

カケハシ・プロジェクト事業統括

稲垣 祥子 Shoko INAGAKI

Since I started working on the KAKEHASHI Project in FY2023, I've seen so many moments where participants' lives changed or their perspectives broadened—and those moments never fail to move me. Even though the exchange lasts only a week, reading the alumni stories reminded me how powerful this program can be. I sincerely hope the KAKEHASHI Project continues for many years to come!

2023年度にカケハシ・プロジェクトを担当して以来、これまで幾度も、参加者一人ひとりの人生が変わる瞬間や、世界が大きく広がっていく瞬間に立ち会ってきました。そのたびに鳥肌が立つような感動や、思わず目が潤むような気持ちを分けていただきました。このような体験を、仕事として何度も味わえることは決して当たり前ではなく、本当に幸せなことだと感じています。人生において一週間は短い時間かもしれませんが、しかし皆さんの寄稿文を読みながら、この一週間の交流が人生にもたらす影響の大きさを、改めて実感しました。これからもカケハシ・プロジェクトが長く続いていくことを、心から願っています。

カケハシ・プロジェクト(米国)招へい担当

染谷 有希 Yuki SOMEYA

カケハシ・プロジェクトの招へい担当となって以来、毎回最終報告会に参加し、皆さんと直接お会いできる時間は、私にとって何より大切な瞬間です。一人ひとりの表情や語られる経験や思いに触れるたびに、一週間という短い期間にもかかわらず、このプログラムがその後の人生に与える大きな可能性を実感してきました。同時に、このプロジェクトの一端を担えていることに、私自身静かな誇りと深い意義を感じています。本記念誌に寄せられた心揺さぶられる言葉たちの向こうには、この何倍もの参加者それぞれの歩みが広がっているかと思うと胸が熱くなります。ここで得た経験や出会いが、これからも皆さんの中で長く息づき、彼らの、そして両国間の豊かな未来へと広がっていくことを心より願っています。Wishing the KAKEHASHI Project continues to be a bridge that brings you all together and connects our countries in a truly meaningful and lasting way.

カケハシ・プロジェクト(カナダ)担当

相馬 典敬 Noritaka SOMA

カケハシ・プロジェクト10周年という節目の年に、カケハシ・チームの一員であること、この記念誌の作成に携わることができたことを心より幸せに思います。短期間のプログラムの中で私たちができることには限りがありますが、それでも多くの同窓生の人生の選択に寄与していると思うと、このプロジェクトの意義の大きさを改めて感じます。次の10年、どのような出会いが生まれ、まだ見ぬ誰かがどのような感動に出会っていくのか、とても楽しみです。一つひとつのプログラムが、国と国、人と人との友情や平和に、ほんの少しでも寄り添い、力になれば幸いです。

With deep love to all our alumni and everyone who has supported this project—and with boundless excitement to all those who will encounter it in the years ahead. Peace!

カケハシ・プロジェクト(米国)派遣担当

近江 芹菜 Selina OMI

カケハシ・プロジェクトの担当となってから、まもなく1年が経とうとしています。派遣プログラムに同行する機会にも恵まれ、参加者の皆さんが互いに協力し合い、わずか1週間という限られた期間で学びを深めていく姿を間近で見守ることができました。帰国後も参加者同士はもちろん、現地で出会った学生や関係者との交流が続いている様子から、本プロジェクトをきっかけに国境を越えて広がっていくネットワークの大きさを実感しています。10周年という節目に、皆さんの体験記を拝読し、それぞれがこの経験を自分のものとして受け止めていることを強く感じました。その歩みの一端に関わられたことを光栄に思うとともに、この「出会い」と「学び」がこれからの未来へとつながっていくことを願っています。

カケハシ・プロジェクト(米国)元派遣担当

赤坂 麻衣 Mai AKASAKA

カケハシ・プロジェクトを担当していた頃を振り返ってみると、本当にさまざまな出来事が思い出されます。パスポートの紛失やフライトの遅れ、コロナやインフルエンザにかかってしまう人、文化の違いから起きた予想外のトラブルもありました。早朝や深夜に米国からの電話で対応した日々も、今では懐かしい記憶です。それでも一番心に残っているのは、参加者のみなさんの笑顔です！このカケハシ・プロジェクトが皆さんの人生のどこかで前向きな力になっていたら、とても嬉しく思います。

KAKEHASHI Project 10th Anniversary Commemorative Booklet

「MY KAKEHASHI STORY」

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国際交流部

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JAPAN INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION CENTER