



4-H International Exchange Program

The Problem

Cultural competence is a key factor in accepting others. This is learned by having an awareness of one's own cultural identity and also having the ability to learn about others. Immersive experiences provide a platform for learning.

The Plan

Through a partnership with Texas Global Education and Cultural Exchange, 4-H youth and families experience a culturally immersive program. LABO and LEX delegates from Japan are hosted by Texas 4-H Families for four weeks.

The Response

Texas 4-H Families were recruited to host 18 Japanese youth and 3 adult chaperons for a four-week homestay. The process included in-home visits, an orientation, two group meetings, and several phone conversations.



The Results

Twenty-two families and the Texas 4-H Conference Center served as Host Families during the 2015 LABO and LEX International Exchange Program for 18 Japanese youth and 3 adult chaperons. The delegates arrived at DFW airport and completed an overnight orientation program to prepare for their transport to families across Texas. Families arrived on July 22 and were introduced to their guest, participated in games and activities to acquaint the delegates and the families. Each family then departed and 'did their own thing for four weeks'. Sixteen families traveled back to Dallas on August 18 for the Departure Party and completed the evaluation. The remaining delegates met in Dallas, but the families were unable to meet.

When asked "How did you enjoy the hosting experience?", all sixteen families responding answered favorably with 69% indicating it was an excellent experience and 31% reporting a good experience. Comments included 'It was a great experience for everyone in the family', 'Could have been better if delegate could speak some English.' Family responses to the question, 'Why did your family decide to host?' included

- Cultural experience, expose the girls to a student from another country, wanted the girls to gain perspective on their own opportunities.
- We thought it would be an excellent way to expose our children to another culture.'

'Were your expectations met?'

- 'Absolutely – exceeded them. In many ways felt this was easier than anticipated. Rika bonded so well with all of us - perfect guest. Language barrier wasn't as challenging as we thought when we didn't understand each other, we laughed and worked through it.'
- 'We thoroughly enjoyed him, but communication was definitely a challenge. Their age is a factor in their initiation so lots of work for the host family to include him in conversation.' It is evident that the Japanese youth vary in their English speaking skills and for some families this was a hardship, but for others, they saw it is an opportunity.

Using a separate evaluation instrument for the 4-H youth Hosts, 71% responded that it was an excellent experience serving as a host, while 29% reported it as 'good'; n=17. When asked of their delegates' English speaking skills, 13% felt it was excellent, 25% good and 56% fair. But what was encouraging is that by the end of the four week homestay, 76% felt their delegate had improved their English skills. Favorite experiences of the youth included 'Learning about the Japanese culture', 'teaching her about America', 'Learning parts of their language' and 'I really loved getting to know her and becoming her friend.' When the 4-H youth were asked if they learned any of the Japanese language, 82% reported they had, while 18% responded 'no, not really'. What they did learn about the Japanese culture included 'Everything is smaller and they are very polite', 'about their food, money and games' and 'their customs and rules'. 18% of the 4-H youth responded they would like to travel to Japan.