

Getting Involved in the Community

By Sara Birnbaum

My name is...

- Sara, originally of Massachusetts, USA
- Third year in Kuma Village
- JHS and ES ALT
- Background in Japanese language and culture
- In Eikaiwa Circle, Hyottoko Dance Club

Community Involvement

- Finding things to do outside of school
- Interacting with your school outside the classroom and staffroom
- Getting involved in your local Japanese community

Workshop Contents

- Lecture Portion
 - Why should you get involved?
 - Challenges
 - Your network
- Discussion Portion
 - In groups, with some provided questions
 - Sharing time
- Conclusion

My Experience

- Challenges of being an introverted Inaka JET
- Eikaiwa was a long established group, but that came with its own annoyances and challenges
- Traditional dance became an important to me in more ways than one

Why Should You Get Involved?

- Getting involved depends on your goals as a JET, your interests, placement, and personality
- Japanese language; International visibility within the community; interaction with adults, not just children 24/7; more interaction with students
- You will learn something new
- Improves overall wellbeing; can make the best memories of your JET experience

Challenges

- No matter your situation, there are challenges and opportunities for all
- Japanese ability: almost all club activities will be entirely held in Japanese
- Interest: depends on availability
- Placement: rural communities have more limited options; urban communities?
- Personality: introverts/extroverts

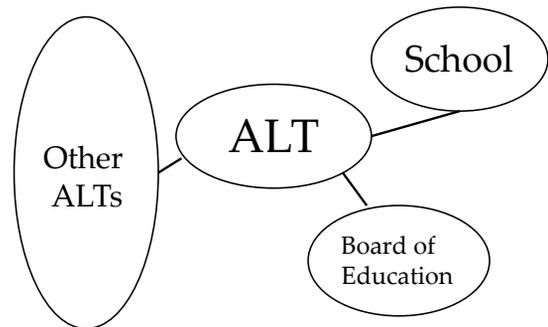
Things to Know

- Officially: No outside employment (that includes contracts or a supplementary salary); everything is voluntary for you
- Outside work culture
 - Often require strong commitment
 - Work commitments always overshadow club, but those lines are blurred in a school club
 - Commitment depends on the club, itself

Things to Know, cont.

- Difficulty getting into a desired club, or isolation within the club
- Increased visibility for the ALT in the school/community comes with its own hidden pitfalls
 - Exposes the ALT's personal life to more gossip, might be asked to comment on issues abroad

Your Network



Your Network: School

- English clubs, sports clubs, arts and culture clubs
- Depending on your school, you can take steps to start your own club for students
- Teachers are not usually local, so won't know much about the town and its residents and events; they are also mostly occupied with their own jobs and club activities

Your Network: BoE

- Town clubs are administered by the Community Ed. Division in the BoE
- Ideally, they know all the public clubs and whom to call to introduce you
- Available in your area from the BoE: arts clubs, sports clubs, cultural clubs and activities

Your Network: Other ALTs

- Can introduce you to groups and give advice or help you search for specific activities.
- Can tell you about opportunities outside your own town or official town clubs
- Can help you with Japanese
- Travel buddies, listening ears, resources

Discussion

In groups of 5-10 people, please discuss:

- Finding activities in an urban placement
- How to join in with limited Japanese, ideas for other activities
- How to go about starting a school club
- General discussion about the lecture, other ideas to add

Conclusion

My Advice:

- Be open.
- Don't be afraid.
- Try new things.
- If you don't know, ask!

Getting involved doesn't mean forcing yourself into doing things. Give yourself time to achieve a work/life balance that's right for you.

Surveys & Questions