**2016 BCA FBWA Youth Exchange Program**

**Report**

We would like to begin by thanking the following individuals:

* Rev. Michael Endo of the Bishop’s office for his valuable assistance in coordinating the trip to Japan and maintaining contact with the Hongwanji.
* We would also like to thank Southern District BWA ministerial advisors Rev. Marvin Harada of Orange County Buddhist Church and Rev. Kenji Akahoshi of the Buddhist Temple of San Diego for their guidance and trust in allowing our committee to move forward with this project.
* Shizue Yahata and June Shiigi of the Northwest District for providing us with information from their experiences and responding to our many questions and concerns. Their detailed report and supporting documents were extremely helpful, including the format for this report.
* Southern District BWA for their generous donation of $1,000 for our selected young ladies, Kelli Kato and Katelyn Morimoto, to help fund their trip. Each girl received $500.

**Information Gathering, Organizing Committee, Call for Applications**

In January of 2016 our committee was established and we set a timeline of events and due dates. The timeline included:

* Distribution of information to all the Southern District chapters.
* Deadline for applications.
* Date for the applications to be sent to committee members for initial review and scoring.
* Date for committee members to send their results to the contact person (Diane Barron) so that the scores could be tallied.
* Meeting date for the committee to get together, discuss and review scoring results and select two young ladies. Two alternates were also to be chosen at this meeting.

We were very fortunate that Northwest District shared all the documents they used for the entire program and we were able to use them as templates to generate the necessary documents applicable to Southern District. These documents included:

* A **Cover Letter** which thanked the applicants for their interest, indicated the dates of the exchange in Japan (July 17-29), the meeting with Lady Ruzumi Ohtani, passport recommendations, estimated notification date of selections and requested submission of Information for Host Family Form.
* **Flyer**: The Flyer indicated eligibility requirements, opportunities the program offered, criteria, benefits, submission address and due date. This flyer was sent to all Southern District chapters.
* **Overview**: The Overview described the purpose and goals of the BCA FBWA Youth Exchange, benefits, eligibility, who and where to submit the application, two letters of recommendations required, submission deadline, selection criteria and expectations of the selected young women after the exchange. An applica-tion deadline date (April 15, 2016) was selected based on the expected dates the students would be traveling to Japan and the time needed for the selection process.
* **Application Form**: We used the Northwest District’s form and made it applicable to our district. It included questions forwarded by Rev. Endo and suggested by Rev. Castro when Northwest District chaired this program. Two letters of recommendation were required: one from the minister of the applicant’s temple and a second letter of recommendation from a temple member or community member.

**Selection Process**

It was requested that applications be submitted by email to Diane Barron, the contact person. The applicants were made anonymous by assigning a code name, ie. YEP1, YEP 2, etc. These code names were applied throughout the application and letters of recommendation to maintain anonymity to those who were doing the scoring. Temple and city affiliations were also removed. Original applications were also kept on file. We received a total of seven applications.

The committee members had approximately two weeks to review the applications, score them and send their scores to Diane. She then tallied the scores for the final selection meeting which was held on May 14, 2016. At this meeting we reviewed the final scores and had the opportunity to share ideas and suggestions for the scoring. We were so appreciative of the rubric scoring system established by the Northwest District. How-ever, if this rubric is used in the future, we would like to recommend a change for Question No. 4. This question asked applicants to list participation in activities at their temple, as follows: Dharma School, Junior YBA, YBA, YAC, YLT, JSC workshops, etc. The established rubric assigns 1 point for each year of participation, leadership position/award, and bonus points (unspecified number).

During the Committee’s discussion of this question, there were concerns regarding the following issues:

1. The potential overall number of points which could be earned for participation in activities, leadership positions and awards, as compared to the maximum number of points which could be earned for the three essay questions is heavily weighted against the three essay questions (up to 5 points for each essay question; 15 points maximum). Two applicants this year had participation points in excess of 30 points. Theoretically, an applicant whose essays are less than mediocre in terms of understanding of Jodo Shinshu Buddhism, effort put forth, writing ability and sincerity, but who has many activity points could have the highest overall score.
2. An applicant affiliated with a large temple with many programs available to the Sangha would have an advantage because an applicant from a small temple would not have an opportunity to participate in such activities. For example, not all temples have affiliated basketball teams, Japanese language/culture schools and scouting programs. In fact, from time to time there may not be a sufficient number of youth at a temple to have a Jr. YBA.

While previous and current temple participation is an important issue, the essay questions are designed to provide critical insight into an applicant’s understanding of Jodo Shinshu teachings and its applicability to their lives, as well as the applicant’s potential to effectively utilize the experience from participating in the FBWA sponsored trip to Japan to become future leaders in the propagation of Jodo Shinshu Buddhism.

As a result of our discussion, the Committee recommends that the points awarded for Question No. 4 be limited to a maximum of 5 points, with up to 2 bonus points for truly exceptional participation in activities and leadership positions. This scoring scale would more evenly weight essay question points with participation points.

No. 4 List Participation: 1 – 5 points; up to 2 Bonus points for exceptional participation and/or leadership.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Activity | No. of Years | Leadership position/awards | Comments/details |
| Dharma School |  |  |  |
| Jr. YBA |  |  |  |
| YBA |  |  |  |
| YAC |  |  |  |
| YLT |  |  |  |
| JSC Workshops |  |  |  |
| Etc. |  |  |  |

**Contacting Selected Youths**

Once the scores were tallied, Diane notified Rev. Harada, who then notified the two young ladies who were selected, Katelyn Morimoto of Gardena Buddhist Church and Kelli Kato of Orange County Buddhist Church.

Diane notified the alternates and those who were not selected by email letters.

Sue Moribe was our designated liaison with BCA and notified Rev. Endo and sent him the applications of the selected girls.

The **Information for Host Family Form** was sent to not only the two selected students but also to the alternates to fill out and submit to Diane. This form asked for personal information, contact persons, hobbies, food restrictions and allergies, and about special medical needs. The alternates also needed to submit their forms should any of the selected students become unable to travel on the assigned dates. These forms were sent to Rev. Endo who in turn forwarded them to Japan and the host families.

**Gifts to Japan from FBWA**

Jodi Hisamoto of Orange County Buddhist Church and Kathy Hori of Gardena Buddhist Church were asked to coordinate the purchasing of the gifts. Their BWA groups, as well as Kelli and Katelyn, purchased gifts for the recipients on Rev. Endo’s list and the homestay families.

Gift suggestions from Rev. Endo included:

* Large boxes or cans of candy (i.e. 1 pound box of See’s Peanut Brittle. No chocolate due to the warm weather.
* Jelly Belly candy
* Peet’s coffee, Major Dickison, House Blend 101 (not sold in Japan).

The list of gift recipients is as follows:

* Monshu and Lady Ohtani and children
* Zenmonshu and Lady Ohtani
* Naiji-bu (Office of the Monshu)
  + Supervisor (one large box or can of candy for the staff to share)
* Soshiki Kyoka-bu (Education and Organizational Department in charge of Exchange Program.
  + Supervisor (one large box or can of candy for staff to share)
  + 2-3 staff members (small items to give to staff who directly assists the girls)
* Hongwanji International Department
* Supervisor (one large box or can of candy for staff to share)
* 2-3 staff members (small items to give to staff who directly assists the girls)
* Governor (Somu) overseeing International Department (one large box or can of candy)

**Flight Arrangements**

Flight arrangements were made through JTB in San Francisco. Rev. Endo contacted the travel office and the travel representatives dealt directly with the families of the YEP girls. Date of departure was July 17, with arrival on July 18 to Kansai International Airport in Osaka, Japan. Return flight to the U.S. was on July 29, again from Kansai.

**Itinerary, Coordination with Japan through Bishop’s Office**

Rev. Endo was the contact person at the Bishop's office with the representatives in Japan for the dates, home stays and itinerary for the girls. The families also made direct contact with Rev. Endo regarding the home stays with the families in Japan.

**Post Youth Exchange Evaluation, Reports, Article for the Wheel of Dharma**

The girls were asked to write individual reports about their trip to present at the FBWA Conference in October. They were also asked to write an article for The Wheel of Dharma which they plan to write jointly and submit to the Wheel of Dharma by October 10, 2016, for the November edition.

**Oral Reports at the 44th FBWA Conference**

Both Kelli Kato and Katelyn Morimoto will be attending the conference and will present their oral reports at the FBWA General Meeting on Sunday, October 9, 2016.

**Final Thoughts and Recommendations**

The parents of the students were excited for their daughters to experience the trip to Japan to learn about the culture and the opportunity to meet with the Gomonshu and his wife and family. However, the lack of timely information caused a great deal of concern and worry for the families of the young women. A parent request this year asked for direct communication with Rev. Endo at the Bishop's Office. Perhaps an informational page that outlines the process, with email contacts and a timeline might help to ease their apprehension. This can be done at the district level.

Respectfully submitted by,

2016 FBWA Youth Exchange Program Organizing and Selection Committee members:

Kiku Graeber, Miyo Hill, Sue Moribe and Aki Tomiyama of the Buddhist Temple of San Diego

Diane Barron and Gail Furuya of the Vista Buddhist Temple

Lynne Ozawa of the Pasadena Buddhist Temple

Date of report: September 9, 2016