

# Host Town High School Students Building Links with Germany

**High school students from five cities registered as Host Towns have created proposals for the realization through sports of a harmonious and inclusive society and the revitalization of local communities.**

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As part of the Host Town Initiative, in which people in Japan interact with people from countries and regions participating in the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games, twelve high school students living in five cities registered as Host Towns for the Federal Republic of Germany (hereinafter Germany)—Tsuruoka City and Higashine City in Yamagata Prefecture, Maniwa City in Okayama Prefecture, Shimabara City in Nagasaki Prefecture and Nobeoka City in Miyazaki Prefecture—learned about initiatives in Japan and Germany on the themes of a harmonious and inclusive society and the revitalization of local communities through sports, and jointly created proposals for their local governments over the course of three months.

Preparations began with an online meeting held at the beginning of December 2020. As well as the twelve high school students, also taking part were Sambe Shin'ichi, a professor at Keio University specializing in the German language and modern German studies, and seven university students who were supporting them. After the meeting, the high school student participants divided into two groups, one focusing on a harmonious and inclusive society and one on the revitalization of local communities, then started working to create their proposals.

Part of their preparations included interviews with Japanese and German people involved in related activities. The students spoke online with people such as the chairman of the German Disabled Sport Youth association, officers of German local governments, and Japanese para athletes.

Kawagoe Hirofumi from the Katsuyama High School Hiruzen Campus in Maniwa City, says, "I was very inspired by the

Japanese para-equestrian competitor who was always positive even when facing difficulties. I was also impressed with the system in Germany where everyone can enjoy sports together, regardless of age, gender or disability."

As they interviewed relevant people in Germany, the high school students felt that local community sports clubs or associations known as "Verein" play a vital role in the realization of a harmonious and inclusive society and in the revitalization of local communities in Germany. Many of the junior high and high school students playing sports in Japan belong to clubs at the schools they attend. Conversely, in Germany students more commonly participate in their local Verein. A variety of people including senior citizens, people with disabilities and foreigners play sports at the Verein, and they are also places where interactions among these people naturally take place.

Endo Metoro of Haguro High School in Tsuruoka City says, "I felt that to realize a harmonious and inclusive society, it is extremely important that people with and without disabilities can study and play sports together both in schools and places like Verein."

The students also interviewed officers of local governments in each of the Host Towns.

Jogo Mao of Nobeoka High School in Nobeoka City says, "When I spoke with tourism officials in my city, I learned for the first time that there are many very interesting events held within the city. I think efforts to learn about one's own community are also important."

After the interviews, the students continued their communication through emails and online meetings and created proposals.

Matsumoto Yuri of Shimabara High School in Shimabara City says, "It's not so easy to compare Germany and Japan because of their different systems and cultures. It was difficult for us to think about how to utilize Germany's initiatives in workable initiatives in Japan."

Morisaki Takumi of Shimabara High School says, "It was

hard for me to balance creating proposals and studying for school, but by exchanging opinions with high school students from other cities a variety of ideas were formed.”

The students’ proposals were presented at the online Host Town Summit on February 21, 2021. The heads of local governments and an official from the German embassy in Tokyo also joined the presentation online. At the presentation, the group focusing on the realization of a harmonious and inclusive society proposed the promotion of understanding and interactions with people different from oneself. They proposed concrete measures including the creation of materials used for teaching about a harmonious and inclusive society for elementary and junior high schools, implementation of events to experience parasports in schools, and promotion of barrier-free access to facilities and systems related to sports. The group focusing on the revitalization of local communities said that the promotion of interactions between people of different generations through sports would lead to a fostering of love for one’s hometown and to revitalizing local communities, and they proposed some measures such as the establishment of facilities and websites promoting multi-generational interactions, and organizing interplay between various sports groups and high school students.

The presentations received high praise from city mayors, who said things like, “the proposals were extremely important for the revitalization of local communities” and “I want to report these proposals to the city council.”

This initiative was a tremendous opportunity for each student to think about their future.

Kato Tomoko, who graduated from Nobeoka Seiun High



A scene from the presentation by high school students at the online Host Town Summit

School in Nobeoka City and has been studying economics at a university in Tokyo since April 2021, says, “My dream is to start my own business. When I do, I’d like always to consider foreigners and people with disabilities.”

Konno Misuzu of Haguro High School in Tsuruoka City says, “This experience was extremely useful for me in learning about social business, which is something I have been interested in. I want to start an online community where members respect each other’s individuality and improve their self-esteem through social networking services.”

This initiative for high school students living in Host Towns for Germany began again in May with new members and a new theme. The new members plan to present proposals at the “Host Town House” meeting to be held online during the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games from July to September this year. 



High school students and other participants at the Host Town Summit held online on February 21, 2021