

Actionwork ipoweri young teens woo Japanese students and teachers with their impressive creative workshops in schools.

Last week Andy Hickson, Director of Actionwork, took three teenage students from Worle school in Weston and one student from London on a 12,000-mile round trip to Japan. The young group toured schools in Japan running their anti-bullying sessions. Not only did these sessions attract the Japanese national press (Asahi News), one session in a school saw three reporters, two photographers, one Japanese filmmaker, two Government Board of Education officials, the Headmaster, the Deputy Headmaster, seven teachers and five parents observing one of the sessions run by the young people.



Andy Hickson, Director of Actionwork, said "This has been a great experience for the young people involved, both those from Japan and those from England. The Japanese students had not experienced anything like this before; young people teaching other young people how to deal with issues of bullying. The Japanese are much more used to being told what is what by adults – peer support is a new concept to them." The young people themselves; Zak Chowdhury (17), Sarah Clews, Shi Shi Zhang (15), and Chris Kemp (14) have been fantastic role-models, representing Britain in a very positive light. This cross-

cultural project is the brainchild of Andy Hickson who believes that we can learn an awful lot about ourselves when we see our thoughts, our ideas, our views through the eyes of another culture. Andy Hickson says "I am so pleased with the support we have got from this project, such as the great support we have got from Worle school, particularly the teacher Sarah Normandale who gave up her time to come to Japan with us and Amanda Cottril who has tirelessly pushed through the admin side of things for us. We also got financial support from the Sasa Kawa Foundation, and Bakers Dolphin coaches helped us with transportation. All the teens parents have also been tremendously supportive and helpful"



The second stage of this project sees Actionwork bringing a Japanese group of teenagers to Weston-super-Mare in March (next month) to run some Japanese creative anti-bullying sessions here. Andy Hickson says "I hope the Japanese group receive as warm a welcome in England as we did in Japan. I think the sessions for the Japanese teenagers are going to be a real challenge for them, they are not used to the English school system and the amount of relative freedom students in English schools have compared to schools in Japan. It is going to be really interesting how they manage that. It is also going to be really interesting to see how English students respond to the Japanese style of doing things."

After the Japanese visit to the UK, Andy Hickson will be working with the Worle school and London based teens for several more months providing more anti-bullying and workshop facilitation training. The aim is to get the young group skilled and confident enough to go in to any school in the country and run anti-bullying session with groups of students. The young group will not only run their own sessions, the aim is that they develop their own creative programme that is quite unique. "There is also the chance of another cross-cultural exchange trip with another group abroad. "We are still in negotiation with some of our foreign partners about this, and will make details available soon", says Andy Hickson.

