

Leah Nanai

In my 7th form year I won a trip to Japan and participated in an International Lions Camp which involved 45 youth from 25 different countries. It was primarily this experience that sparked my interest in Japan. I studied Japanese society and education system as part of my undergraduate degree. Once I finished my degree I headed for Japan to teach English as part of a sister city programme between Hutt City and Minoh City. I studied Japanese on my own and also had private tuition. Living in the country surrounded by Japanese people gave me a desire to learn the language - in order to truly get to know people, communication is the key, so studying Japanese was a natural step once I set foot on Japanese soil.

I lived in Japan for over 7 years, during which time I gave birth to my son. Having no desire to leave Japan I had to find a way in which I could earn a living as a single parent to support my son and I. The opportunity to own an English School Franchise arose which enabled me to run the school from my home and teach while taking care of my son at home. The school eventually grew such that I could hire teachers and spend more time being a mother. In order to run my English School Franchise I used Japanese for administration purposes, talking to parents and prospective students and I also used a little Japanese when teaching. When my son was attending *hoikusho* (Japanese preschool) I spoke Japanese with the teachers and other parents.

On return to New Zealand I enrolled in a graduate diploma in teaching and will be teaching primary school from the beginning of the 2008 school year.

Speaking Japanese has truly enriched my life and my son's life. We often still use Japanese at home, and my son will often ask how to say certain things in Japanese. I am looking forward to teaching Japanese and sharing the joys of another culture with kiwi kids.

