

Canada-Japan Co-op Program Work Term Report



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For the past four months, I have had the pleasure of working at Pasona Group and living on Awaji Island in Japan. I worked as the Education Co-op student, where my duties included assisting teachers in the classroom, helping with lesson preparations, and presenting monthly interim reports to the HR department.

My work term experience

My fellow Canadian intern and I had the opportunity to explore multiple sites during our first week at Pasona in order to fully understand Pasona's work towards regional revitalization. Pasona has opened many tourist attractions, such as Nijigen no Mori (an anime theme park), Hello Kitty Showbox (a Guinness World Record breaking showbox in the shape of a large apple), Chef's Garden (a row of over 25 eateries right on the water), and more. As Pasona Group works on bringing human resources to aid in the development of revitalizing more rural areas, they create new opportunities and industries presenting art, culture, food, and education. Implementing new systems and infrastructures creates new job opportunities, attracting more workers and visitors to Awaji Island.

The Nature of the Organization:

Pasona's main mission is stated as "Providing Solutions to Society's Problems". Pasona has a long history of helping groups of people that are systematically oppressed when trying to find work. In 1976, Pasona Group initiated the Temporary Center, a temporary staffing service that allowed homemakers with children to be a part of the workforce. Pasona Group aims to discover and utilize the skill and potential of each individual. Pasona's mission includes:

→ Creating a society in which every person is able to find work that they like and a career that complements their personal goals

→ Working toward a society in which people are free to exercise their talents through an egalitarian relationship between the workplace and the individual

→ Promoting diversity and continually create opportunities for individuals to achieve their dreams

4 Main Goals/Solutions

- HR/BPO Solutions

In order to work towards Pasona's goal of "Providing Solutions to Society's Problems", Pasona focuses on four main solutions. One that is highlighted is HR/BPO solutions, which is one of Pasona Group's main services.

- Life Solution

Pasona Group's Life Solutions aim to solve society's problems by facilitating and supporting childcare, education, nursing care, housekeeping, and other services that are essential to living, yet are often overlooked. For example, Awaji Island International School providing childcare and education for the children of Pasona employees allows parents to ensure their children are safe in a space where they can learn while they are at work.

- Global Solution

Pasona aims to help and improve the global society by providing HR support to Japanese companies aiming to expand internationally.

- Regional Solution

Pasona is working on new job creation in rural areas, such as Awaji Island, by creating attractions to revitalize these lesser known areas. Revitalizing an area by building attractions such as Nijigen no Mori (an anime theme park), Hello Kitty Showbox (Guinness world Record holder of "Largest roof in the shape of a brand character),



and Zenbo Senei (a meditation center that is simultaneously an architectural masterpiece in the mountains).



The nature of the work you are doing

I worked in the Admin department which is composed of various teams that facilitate the systems and programs that are essential to keep the company running. My team within the department is the AIIS (Awaji island International School) team. The school is open to the children of Pasona Group employees, providing pre-school, kindergarten and elementary after-school care. AIIS is an excellent environment for the kids to learn English while discovering and exploring their own interests and talents. One of the most rewarding parts of my time here has been to watch the kids and their competencies grow over the course of four months. The students started out with different English speaking capabilities, but after three

months together, they are all able to communicate their needs and feelings with me. Along with assisting the teachers in carrying out their lessons, I acted as extra incentive for the students to practice their English skills while conducting their experiments and engaging in activities.

The teachers are all great at engaging the students to speak in English. The four and five year olds in particular receive all their instructions in English from 9am to 2pm, and are able to communicate mostly in English. The elementary students also have English class every afternoon, and engage in lessons and activities that allow them to learn and communicate in English. It has been very rewarding helping the students develop their English speaking abilities. One of the teachers also shared with me that the kids were more encouraged to utilize their English speaking skills as they wanted to chat with me and get to know me better. I was delighted to hear this observation, as one of my favourite parts of this experience was chatting and connecting with the students.



Role in the organization

The Awaji Island International School and after school care program is a huge help for working parents, making AIIS an important institution for supporting parent employees.

Where your department fits in the org, its role in the company

The Adomi/Admin department has many responsibilities with the shared goal of keeping the company running. Adomi \ Admin maintains company function and ensures everyone's safety by ensuring buildings and designs are safe to use, overseeing housing facilities and many other company benefits.

The knowledge and skills you are acquiring

Through this experience, I acquired and developed many skills. The new skills that I acquired that I would likely not have obtained had I not done this Co-op work opportunity were:

- Working in an international environment
- Adapting in a foreign environment
- Working through language barriers and cultural challenges
- Teaching skills - specifically skills regarding teaching English as a second language to pre-school, kindergarten and elementary students

Reflection on how this work will contribute to my academic and career development

This work allowed me to experience an international working environment, demonstrating to me how an international company utilizes their different departments. It introduced me to not only my own role, but also many other types of jobs that may be of interest to me in the future.

A description of your relationship with Japanese co-workers and supervisors

As I worked on the AIIS team, most of the co-workers I worked closely with were foreigners, but I still had many interactions and connections with Japanese co-workers and supervisors. Even though I spoke minimal Japanese, we managed to communicate and get to know each other. I found that communicating through the language barrier was, at times, more rewarding than if we spoke the same language fluently, as we both worked hard to have a conversation as we really wanted to get to know each other. Every Japanese co-worker I spoke to was extremely welcoming, and were very interested in learning about me and my life in Canada.

Description of your Japanese living arrangements and cultural experiences

I was provided a company work dormitory, which was conveniently located right above my office. It was great to experience a Japanese work dormitory, and the small space was perfect for my four month work term.

List of cultural experiences

One of my first and favourite cultural experiences occurred during my first weekend in Japan, when a few folks from HR took my fellow intern and I to Kyoto. They said we were going for the sole purpose of eating aburi miso rice cakes, and that we would figure out the rest of our day-trip later. I was delighted and thankful that these co-workers invited us on their day-trip and made sure we felt welcome! Tetsushi San, Miku, Mako and Kakuya showed us around multiple famous shrines, temples and buildings.

Another more regularly occurring experience I had was playing soccer with Japanese coworkers and others from all around the world. This was a great extracurricular activity, as it allowed me to bond with my coworkers outside of work, as well as meeting new people in Awaji.

Location: Awaji Island

Living in Awaji and working as an intern at Pasona Group was a very unique experience, as Simran (the other intern) and I were the first long-term interns of Pasona Group. I was immersed in a smaller community than if I were working in a big city, and in terms of getting to know a place for the short duration of four months, it was the perfect place for me. Especially since this did not stop me from travelling to nearby cities to explore. Prior to leaving for my co-op work term, I was asked several times if I was sad not to have been placed in Tokyo, or if I wished for a bigger city. I was happy with my placement, since I come from a bigger city environment, I considered exploring and living in a smaller town to be an adventure on its own. So one piece of advice I have is to not fret or have any set expectations for your geographical placement, as anywhere will be an adventure, anywhere will provide you with new experiences, and you can travel from anywhere.

Recommendations you would make to other Canada-Japan co-op students on how to obtain or be successful in the kind of work you are doing

If you are considering working abroad, my recommendations to you would be to:

- Do it.
- Have an open mind
- When applying for jobs, don't sell yourself short. Don't be intimidated by applying for jobs in different countries. If a company is open to hiring international students, they want you to apply!
- Remember most people are happy to meet you
- Take every opportunity you can to explore Japan

Overall impression of living in Japan for an extended period and the memories you will bring back home to Canada

Living and working in Japan for four months was unlike any job or travel experience I've ever had. As opposed to a vacation in a foreign country, I got to experience more than a taste of the tourist attractions in Japan, I got to experience having a life and experiencing work culture in Japan. Making friends, connections and getting closer to the people I met was one of the things that made me the most grateful for my four months in Japan. Some of my favourite memories from my work term are the simple moments in the office getting to know my coworkers while working and drinking coffee, or getting dinner and drinks after work. All of which are experiences I would not have gotten if I hadn't gotten the opportunity to live and work in Japan. My best advice is to embrace any opportunity you receive, and enjoy your experiences free from any expectations. Also, be aware you're going to be uncomfortable, as you are likely going to be venturing well outside of your comfort zone. Just know that you are growing, and it is completely normal to feel lonely, nervous, and scared.