



SOUTH BAY ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES CENTER

South Bay Cities Council of Governments

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Volunteer Spotlight

A Personal Account: Daisuke Saito



I am 35 years old from Japan and came to Torrance to volunteer at SBESC while being accommodated at a local homestay. In Japan, I worked for a newspaper company for 10 years as a writer & editor. My area of specialization was information technology (IT), government policy and local government. I often interviewed IT companies' Executive and Government Officers to write articles about government policy, new service, technology and strategies used by such companies as Microsoft and IBM. Recently, IT companies have begun investing and developing technology for Smart Cities. Smart Cities are cities that provide facilities to people without harming the environment and use minimum natural conventional resources in order to achieve maximized economic growth and increased standard of living. Through my work I became very interested in Smart Cities and considered changing jobs to survey them. The environmental aspect of Smart Cities is an important element, and although I was knowledgeable about IT, I did not understand the environmental side as well. Therefore, I decided that I wanted to go back to school and get my Master's degree in the study of Environment and Smart Cities. I was planning to study at the University of Malaysia this September, however I felt I needed to gain some experience and learn more about the environment first. So I found SBESC through their website and applied for a volunteer position.

There are three reasons why I applied to volunteer at SBESC. Firstly, I wanted to learn about environmental work before I started to study abroad, making sure it was worth pursuing. SBESC was a great fit because it is a local government organization that works with energy companies and a utility municipality (i.e. gas, electricity and water). In addition, SBESC's mission statement is similar to the subject material that I want to study for my Master's degree. Secondly, I wanted to understand American culture and experience working for an American company or organization. I was looking for places that had volunteer or internship programs, but most of the companies that I asked were

Japanese; I wanted to find an American organization, so SBESC was a perfect fit! Finally, my desire to improve my English speaking skills was one of my most important goals. I studied for an English test; however it only satisfied the test requirements. I can read and write in English, but I can't speak the language very well. I could have gone to a language school, but there is a big difference between a classroom and working in an office environment. Hence, I chose to work as a volunteer so I could develop my English in a more interactive and challenging setting.

I think one thing I learned through volunteering at SBESC was the ability to work in diverse circumstances. Many volunteers come from various backgrounds and from different generations. Some people work on small tasks around the office, while others compile reports and research, and many volunteers work booths, conducting public outreach at community events. When I came to SBESC, I was nervous because I was not good at speaking English, but I soon got over that concern as time passed and I became more confident. Volunteer coordinators, other staff and volunteer members were all very nice and made me feel comfortable. Furthermore, we were given the opportunity to improve various skills as volunteers of the program. If I had an idea, I made a suggestion to the staff. In this case, I was able to contribute more to the volunteer program than I expected. The volunteer program at SBESC encourages volunteer feedback, providing endless opportunities for improvement. Finally, I really appreciated all of the kindness from SBESC staff and volunteers. I am happy to say that I had the opportunity to volunteer at SBESC and would recommend it for anyone who is interested.