PRESS ANNOUNCEMENT
For Immediate Release

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Participants Selected for the
2016-17 Shinzen USA Goodwill Program

SAN FRANCISCO (August 2, 2016) – The Japanese Cultural and Community Center of Northern California (JCCNC) is proud to announce the selection of 18 youth participants and its coaches for the 2016-17 Shinzen Nikkei Youth Goodwill Program (Shinzen Program). In celebration of the 110th Anniversary of San Francisco’s Japantown, the JCCNC is coordinating a special 2016-17 (two year) program culminating with a trip to Japan in the summer of 2017.

The JCCNC has organized U.S.-Japan youth cultural exchange programs for nearly 20 years, with the first being the inaugural Shinzen Program in 1997. Although the JCCNC has not coordinated the Shinzen Program for the past seven years, Paul Osaki, Executive Director of the JCCNC mentions, “We understand that a first-hand cultural experience is invaluable in helping the youth in our Japanese American community develop and define their identity, while also establishing a greater connection to their sometimes seemingly distant heritage. It is by experiencing things on their own that the history and heritage of their ancestors is realized.”
The selected participants for the 2016-17 Shinzen Program include: Girls Team Coach Rachelle Hata and players, Miya Chan, Charlene Tonai Din, Tomi Eijima, Alyssa Ikuma, Kristin Katayama, Taylor Matoba, Izumi Murase, Lauren Noguchi, Taylor Noguchi and Olivia Yoshii; Boys Team Coach Ryan Baba and players, Aiden Fujimoto, Ryan Kawamura, Connor Nakamura, Stephen Nakamura, Tyler Tsudama, Jake Tsutaoka, Josh Tsutaoka and Kellen Uyeda.

Over the past two months, the youth participants have attended weekly workshops to help develop their sense of cultural identity and learn about the Japanese American experience from immigration to current day by watching a drama series. Through discussions about the drama, the youth better understand the struggles and sacrifices of their Issei ancestors and what challenges the early generations faced during World War II. They also learned about Japanese American culture and heritage including the history of San Francisco Japantown and have gained leadership experience through public speaking and collaborative activities. Each of the participants will create their own family history books, something that the JCCNC feels is
important as we celebrate the 110th Anniversary of our Japantown. This project will not only carry on the history and stories of our community, but it will allow these middle- and high-school youth to gain a better understanding of themselves as young Japanese Americans. When asked ‘what did you learn about yourself this summer,’ Ryan Kawamura answered, “I learned that I am part of a community whose ancestors fought for a better life for me and other Japanese Americans.” Charlene Tonai Din, a Yonsei who is Chinese and Japanese American added, “I am proud of my mixed culture. I am part of a diverse community held together by courage.” Tomi Eijima shared her thoughts on the Japanese American experience, “I have a better appreciation for the Issei and Nisei generations for paving the way (for us).”

The activities for the youth next summer include workshops to prepare for their trip to Japan as young ambassadors representing our community, learning Japanese customs, language and etiquette, planning and preparing intercultural activities for youth and children, basketball practices, leadership development activities, volunteering at community events and fundraising.

Upcoming fundraising activities for the Shinzen Program include an All You Can Eat Udon Fundraiser on Sunday, October 16, 11:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m. at the JCCCNC; “J-town Jam” a Dance on Saturday, November 26 and a Raffle with a Grand-prize of a trip to Japan for Two. For more information about the Shinzen Program please contact the JCCCNC at (415) 567-5505.

Shinzen Program History
In 1997, the JCCCNC and the office of the Consulate General of Japan in San Francisco agreed that although there were a substantial number of traditional, cultural and intellectual exchanges between the U.S. and Japan, there existed a greater need for meaningful dialogue between youth in Japan and Japanese American youth. Through these discussions was born the Shinzen Nikkei Youth Goodwill Program, formed to create a more dynamic and meaningful exchange between the youth and to provide unique opportunities for the exchange of ideas and important values among young people. The Shinzen players work to
achieve these goals by creating friendships at a local level to help reinforce a future of global peace and goodwill.

Since the inaugural visit to Japan, over 1200 participants (players and their families) have visited Japan or hosted a Japanese youth in their home for the Shinzen Program. Over the years, Shinzen alumni have continued to stay involved in the Japanese American community, as youth coaches, volunteers, community interns, and many have returned to Japan to continue to build and foster international relations and stay connected to their cultural heritage.

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About the Japanese Cultural and Community Center of Northern California (JCCNC)
Envisioned by the Japanese American community, JCCNC will be an everlasting foundation of our Japanese American ancestry, cultural heritage, histories and traditions. The JCCNC strives to meet the evolving needs of the Japanese American community through programs, affordable services and administrative support and facilities for other local service organizations. The JCCNC is a 501(c)(3) non-profit community center based in San Francisco.