

JWLI ECOSYSTEM



Atsuko Fish Establishes the JWLI Scholarship for Immigrants and Refugees in Japan

Boston, MA, October 27, 2021 – Atsuko Fish, a Boston-based philanthropist and a pioneer in Japanese women’s leadership and entrepreneurship, established the JWLI Scholarship for immigrants and refugees in Japan. Originally from Japan and the first-generation Asian immigrant based in Boston, Fish is a founding board member of the Fish Family Foundation, a leading grant-maker serving immigrants in Massachusetts since 1999.

“The vision of the JWLI Scholarship is to provide Japan-based immigrants and refugees with equal opportunity for higher education, and to protect their human rights in Japan,” says Fish. She firmly believes that “equal opportunity for immigrants and refugees in Japan will bring significant changes to the country, and that their resilience from surviving tough experiences will make Japan richer and stronger.”

The JWLI Scholarship aims to foster leaders for a diverse Japan. Its goal is beyond a university diploma. The program honors the contributions of immigrants and refugees to Japan and celebrates their unique, multi-cultural potentials and talents. These individuals will not only bring diversity to university campuses, but also play an important role in transforming Japan to be more economically competitive, innovative, and compassionate.

Under the Japanese Women’s Leadership Initiative (JWLI), an ecosystem for women nonprofit leaders and social entrepreneurs in Japan, the JWLI Scholarship is the fourth program after the JWLI Fellow Program, the Champion of Change Japan Award, and the JWLI Bootcamp. An alumni community includes 110 women leaders and entrepreneurs. Leveraging their expertise, this program was born.

[JWLI Scholarship:](#)

The JWLI Scholarship is unique; it is offered to those who are already based in Japan unlike other scholarship programs that invite students abroad to Japan on an international student visa. Internationally infamous as a country unfriendly to immigrants and refugees, Japan casually rejects their pleas to enter the country. In 2019, Japan granted refugee status to only 44 out of 10,375 applicants. Also, Japan-based immigrants, who are neither Japanese citizens nor international students, are a blind spot for such support as government-funded student loans and many other scholarships. A 2018 report from the Japanese Ministry of Education published a shocking 30% discrepancy in the college entrance rates between immigrant high school students at 42% and its Japanese counterpart at 71%.

The JWLI Scholarship offers a full tuition for four years with an annual living stipend. The inaugural cohort of four will start their undergraduate studies in April 2022. Below have been selected from the fall application round. Two more will be chosen in December.

The JWLI Scholarship also offers non-financial support. This culturally sensitive, confidential support is crucial to prevent drop-out, nurture the best, safest learning experience, and prepare for a career after graduation. Scholars will receive mentorship, peer-coaching, academic support, Japanese language assistance, internships, and career training. Most importantly, they will join a lifelong JWLI community.

Selected JWLI Scholars:

For confidentiality purposes, the selected students' identities are made anonymous.

Student A lives in eastern Japan. Prosecuted in the country of origin, she moved to Japan with her family 10 years ago. A true leader at birth, she has been active in student activities throughout junior high and high schools. Her dream is to build a multicultural, multilingual school for children like herself and other young people with unique, diverse backgrounds.

Student B lives in eastern Japan. She moved to Japan five years ago. She aspires to be an independent woman despite her native culture that often expects women to marry young with no prospect for career opportunities. She wants to study programming/coding and work in the technology industry. That is because she believes that technology empowers those disadvantaged like herself and reduces inequality.