

Column: Homestay at households of the elderly in a “New Town” – an initiative of a nearby university

Kozoji New Town in Kasugai City in Aichi Prefecture is one of the three largest New Towns (housing developments) in Japan. Occupation of the new town began in 1968. The aging of the entire population is one of the typical problems that the residents of such a residential area face.

In order to solve this problem, Chubu University located near the new town launched an exchange project between the elderly in the new town and its students including homestay of the latter in the houses of the former for the revitalization of the local community and co-learning of the students.

Students of the university stayed at three houses of the elderly each in 2013 and 2014. They stayed at both the houses of an elderly couple and an elderly person living alone. They stayed at those houses for four days and three nights. Some of the students participated in activities of groups of senior citizens with the hosts and visited a nearby art museum which they would not have visited by themselves.

©Professor Sugimura of Chubu University says, “I would like to develop a system for the sustainable implementation of this project in order to develop a society in which university students and the elderly can participate in activities for community development and inter-generation activities smoothly and actively.”

The university is implementing a plan to revise the educational curriculum so that the homestay will provide students with an opportunity to practice what they learned in classroom and to draw attention of more elderly people to the project by increasing the number of households invited to participate in the explanation meeting on the project from 100 to 20,000.

The university is ready to take up new challenges of homestay at houses with a person in need of long-term care and a person with dementia and extending the period of the homestay to one week.

Column: Aiming at the revival and continuation of the pre-disaster communities – Activities of the reconstruction public housing supporters

Since the local communities in Kamaishi City suffered serious damage in the Great East Japan Earthquake, the conventional community-based networks have been disrupted. Such a situation has necessitated proactive measures to preserve local communities for the development of productive communities utilizing the conventional community networks.

- ◎ The total population of Kamaishi City was 36,332 people in February 2015, of which 12,899 people were aged 65 and over. The percentage of the elderly of the city, 35.5 %, is larger than the national average.

The Council of Social Welfare of Kamaishi City launched the Reconstruction Public Housing Support Project in February 2014 and appointed three people who had provided life consultation in the temporary housing as the supporters of the project.

The Reconstruction Public Housing Supporters make 1,100 house visits and conduct 800 interviews in a year in the effort to provide personalized support to the residents of the three reconstruction public housing buildings. They have held 130 gatherings with community residents to strengthen their involvement in the communities.

It is expected that the scale and purposes of the reconstruction support activities are revised as more time has gone by since the earthquake. The supporters are to be engaged in activities for the reconstruction of the impoverished communities and community development using the experience accumulated in the activities including counseling of victims of the earthquake on their life and problems for the development of the existing activities into permanent projects and that of new projects.

Column: Efforts to create “New Tohoku”

In the Tohoku Region, the currently found problems such as the shrinking and aging population were evident even before the earthquake. Therefore, it is hoped that not only the restoration of the conditions existing before the earthquake but also the creation of “New Tohoku,” a model of development for Japan and the world, is achieved by solving these regional problems in the process of the reconstruction. The following measures have been taken as pilot projects to facilitate such pioneering work. A pilot “community support” project is being implemented in Otsuchi Township in Iwate Prefecture. The purpose of the project is the provision of life support with mutual assistance and cooperation within local communities. In this project, the elderly are not only recipients of support but also providers of contents of the project (in the community exchange meetings, creation of community resource maps, etc.) which contribute to learning and improvement of physical conditions of theirs. The “Community Support Center” is being constructed as a new venue in the community where the elderly can receive support for their activities.

In Ishinomaki City, Miyagi Prefecture, efforts are being made for the implementation of “Next-generation Comprehensive Community Care,” which aims at the provision of health, nursing and long-term care at home 24 hours a day. This project is being implemented for the development of local communities after those who are living in the temporary housing have moved to permanent housing. Community residents are involved in the activities being implemented in the project such as workshops to improve their understanding of a comprehensive community care system for its establishment and the seminars for organizing volunteer activities for them.

An unmanned vending system has been established in Kesenuma City, Miyagi Prefecture. It is a prepaid settlement system using a tablet terminal and a person can purchase daily necessities through this system. It provides a service very convenient for those who have difficulty in going shopping or moving.

In Iwaki City, Fukushima Prefecture, a project of a private-sector-led operation of an on-demand bus service, which has been mainly operated by the public sector, is being implemented. As this system offers free transportation between one’s house and member stores, it is expected to offer the elderly who have limited means of transport more opportunities to go out and facilitate the communication among the elderly while they are on the bus.

A project to serve lunch to the elderly living in temporary housing at nursery schools is being implemented in Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima Prefectures. The appropriate nutritional management by dietitians and care provided by the staff and children of the nursery schools are expected to prevent the development of disuse syndrome among them..