

Column

"Earthquake and Persons with disabilities"

(1) From the examination by the Council for the Promotion of Reform of the System for Persons with disabilities

"The Council for the Promotion of Reform of the System for Persons with disabilities" held under the "Headquarters for Promotion of Reform of the System for Persons with disabilities" set up by the Cabinet vigorously examined the promotion of future measures for persons with disabilities from January 2010, focusing on persons with disabilities concerned. However, the Headquarters featured the theme of "Earthquake and Persons with disabilities" on May 23, 2011 and January 23, 24, 2012 in regards to the Great East Japan Earthquake that occurred on March 11, 2011. In addition, it held hearings directly from each central person in charge of administrations (city), organizations for persons with disabilities, and the groups that have been supporting persons with disabilities in time of disaster, which have already been supporting persons with disabilities and have a firm grasp on the situation. In addition, the members of the Promotion Council inspected the damaged areas and performed an on-the-spot (field) survey.

1. The 32nd Council for the Promotion of Reform of the System for Persons with disabilities (May 23, 2011)

The members, for two months after the Earthquake, discussed methods for the support and proper measures for persons with disabilities for the future, based upon the temporary data and information about the situation of damage collected by each member.

(cf. Homepage: Cabinet Office Measures for Persons with Disabilities)

(Source) http://www8.cao.go.jp/shougai/suishin/kaikaku/s_kaigi/k_32/index.html

(Record of Proceedings)

http://www8.cao.go.jp/shougai/suishin/kaikaku/s_kaigi/k_32/giji-youroku.html)

2. The 37th Council for the Promotion of Reform of the System for Persons with disabilities (January 23, 2012)

At the Council, which took place ten months after the Earthquake, when the situation of the damages and life in the evacuation shelters became quite clear, we invited central people in charge of organizations of and for persons with disabilities, NPOs that have been supporting persons with disabilities and the

administration (city), and implemented hearings. In addition, the members of the Promotion Council were divided into Iwate, Miyagi, Fukushima prefectures, investigated on-site, and conducted question-and-answer sessions.

The focal points are mainly these four: 1) Efforts for “people requiring support in the event of disaster”, 2) Safety confirmation and understanding support needs, 3) How to shape the mechanism of support for persons with disabilities soon after a disaster, 4) How to shape support for reconstruction for persons with disabilities.

The council has thus published distributed documents, composed by people who cooperated in the hearings, generally unaltered, for the reference of the reader.

Report from the viewpoint of administration (cities, towns and villages)

(Report by Takeyoshi Nishiura, Minamisoma City Health Welfare Director)

1. Regarding efforts for "people requiring support in the event of disaster"

- **Regarding the effectiveness of current efforts**

In Minamisoma-shi, they devised the "Register of People Requiring Support in the Event of Disaster" to include elderly people and persons with disabilities (those who require care above the third level, level 1-2 Physical Disability Certificate holders, Level A Intellectual Disabilities Certificate holders), and who have agreed to release personal information (66.94%). There are 4,280 people registered.

This plan was distributed to local welfare officers, ward heads, firefighting teams and others, but it did not function, because the citizens of all these areas were evacuated due to the Earthquake.

- **Cooperation and participation of organizations of persons with disabilities in the training and planning for evacuation**

The Minamisoma City Disaster Prevention Plan has been devised and drills for disaster prevention in Minamisoma City have been conducted annually in accordance with the Plan. However, the participation of persons with disabilities of organizations of persons with disabilities has not been called upon in the training and planning for evacuation and, at present, there has been no cooperation with organizations for persons with disabilities.

- **Regarding the creation of the Register of People Requiring Support (setting the range of subjects and privacy protection)**

Regarding the range of subjects, taking into consideration use for other purposes, we decided to include elderly people and persons with disabilities. In

terms of privacy protection, we could only include people who have given consent in the Register under existing legislation, because in ordinary times personal information is strongly protected by the Personal Information Protection Act.

However, after experiencing this disaster, we strongly believe it necessary to have a register of people requiring support, which include all people who would require support, such as the elderly and persons with disabilities.

- **Regarding the role of the Individual Support Plan**

In the event of a disaster, safety confirmation is necessary, but there are also people who require individual support at the time of confirmation. Therefore, it is necessary to create a plan for individual support beforehand.

We intend to share the information regarding people who require support, which was obtained from an investigation by this JDF (Japanese Disabilities Forum), with consultation support companies entrusted by Minamisoma City.

2. Regarding confirmation of safety and understanding support needs

- **Regarding the subject responsible for confirmation of safety and understanding support needs and the system for this purpose**

We believe that understanding support needs and safety confirmation in the event of a disaster is the responsibility of the administration as part of protecting the safety and lives of citizens. However, it is necessary to construct a system, acting immediately in cooperation with organizations and offices of and for persons with disabilities in order to implement such actions.

- **Regarding confirmation by people providing welfare services and their cooperation with the administration**

- **Regarding information disclosure**

Due to the requests from the NPO, Support Center PIA and the JDF (Japan Disability Forum) Fukushima Support Center for Persons with disabilities, we considered the disclosure of personal information from the viewpoint of, “Are we able to disclose personal information in time of emergency?” As a result, by applying an exception in the Minamisoma City Privacy Protection Ordinance, we came to the conclusion that in order to protect the lives, bodies and properties of persons with disabilities, disclosure of such information is justified.

- **Regarding safety confirmation of the welfare service users, such as inpatients, outpatients and home-help recipients**

Confirmation and evacuation was carried out at the respective offices for welfare

service users, including inpatient and outpatient service users. However, at first it was not possible to confirm the safety of individual service users and homebound persons with disabilities, such as home-help users.

- **Regarding safety confirmation of persons with disabilities who do not use the services mentioned above**

Among persons with disabilities who do not use such services, we disclosed information about physically and intellectually persons with disabilities and through the cooperation of the NPO Support Peers and JDF Fukushima Support Center for Persons with disabilities in Affected Areas, we were able to confirm the safety of 590 people.

Regarding people with mental disorders, health nurses of the city and the prefecture investigated the safety of 235 people (27.7%) who had received outpatient psychiatric care, from the point of view whether psychiatric treatment continued.

3. How to shape the mechanism of support for persons with disabilities soon after disasters

- **Regarding evacuation shelters**

- **Problems with regular evacuation shelters**

In most cases, temporary evacuation shelters are school gymnasiums and similar places that are not equipped with toilets for persons with disabilities and have steps: they are not barrier-free. The fact that many evacuation facilities were like this and could not support persons with disabilities was a major issue.

- **Problems with welfare evacuation shelters**

Providing welfare evacuation shelters in the future has become an issue, because Minamisoma City did not establish welfare evacuation shelters that can support persons with disabilities and elderly people.

In addition, as the Fukushima prefecture did not have enough establishments, this forced people to take shelter in gymnasiums and as these places cannot support evacuees, they have had to move to their own houses or those of relatives. In light of the disaster, mainly the country and prefectures need to specify welfare evacuation shelters under a regional system.

- **Regarding support for persons with disabilities in the event of emergency evacuation**

- **Provision of information and relief supplies to evacuation shelters**

In addition to installing television and Internet connections in the evacuation

shelters, we also provided information through various paper information publications. Moreover, we provided relief supplies consisting of daily necessities such as bedding and provided meals.

- **Provision of information and relief supplies to homebound evacuees**

In addition to setting up the Minamisoma City FM station and providing disaster-related information to the homebound refugees, we also provided information through various paper information publications. Moreover, although it was at irregular intervals, we provided homebound refugees with relief supplies consisting of daily necessities such as rice.

In general, we offered supplies regularly in public facilities, but we also provided individual support for persons with disabilities and citizens without cars.

- **Consultation support system in the event of emergency evacuation**

In this city, we arranged community health nurses at the city's information counter and received consultations from evacuees. In addition, where there were requests, we created teams of health nurses from public health centers and caregivers from the Social Welfare Council and carried out patrol visits to perform consultations and provide support.

Furthermore, we have a consultation system in place from prior to the disaster, including in times of emergency evacuation, where we have consigned consultation duties at two designated consultation support offices.

- **Other**

The spread of information at an early stage for people staying at home was made by disaster prevention radio broadcasting and vans with loudspeakers. However, since this method couldn't completely reach all people and some people would shut their windows to prevent damage from radiation, and there were many citizens who were unable to access information.

4. How to shape support for reconstruction for persons with disabilities

- **Securing houses**

- **Regarding temporary housing (construction of barrier-free houses and house repair)**

There were no barrier-free houses in the temporary housing deployed in Minamisoma City in response to the Earthquake. Therefore, after receiving complaints, the city responded in a few days by taking out steps at the entrances and replacing them with slopes. We think that it is necessary to prepare many

barrier-free houses as part of the temporary housing.

- **Deemed temporary housing**

We allow household improvements for rental houses in order to provide daily-use equipment, if the consent of the landlord have been given. Many people use deemed temporary rental houses.

In Minamisoma City, the number of rental houses from the private sector is 4,308 and the number of temporary houses is 3,060.

- **Individual living support**

- **The effectiveness and limits of continuous support by private support groups**

Thanks to the support by the JDF Fukushima Support Center for Persons with disabilities, we were able to achieve great results. However, since the staff belongs to other groups, there are limits in terms of long-term support. The management and utilization of collected data will become a challenge. In addition, as we did not know of the existence of JDF: Such information must be thoroughly shared during ordinary times.

- **Continuation of administrative welfare services and response to new needs**

Ongoing support services such as disability welfare services are important, especially in the event of disaster, as it is a life-threatening event.

We believe that we have been able to offer ongoing support after this Earthquake, with the exception of the period of time immediately following the Earthquake.

We were also able to respond to new needs such as exemptions of financial burdens for users institutionalized as an exception in the event of earthquake.

- **Support for welfare offices**

As the decontamination of facilities for welfare offices has become necessary due to the nuclear plant accident, we need to conduct decontamination in accordance with the city decontamination plan. In addition, although we respond to requests by welfare offices, we are facing issues such as a lack of nursing staff and a shortage of funds due to the suspension of providing support.

- **Employment support**

In this city, we have Hello Work run by the country and the Soso Employment Support Center run by the prefecture, and we are providing employment support through these institutions.

In addition, the staff at Hello Work, the Soso Employment Support Center and

facilities for persons with disabilities, has gathered at the Employment Support Group set up under our city's Council to Support Community Self-Reliance to consider employment opportunities for persons with disabilities.

- **Enrichment of the consultation support system**

There are two designated consultation support offices in our city. Since the number of consultations has increased due to the recent earthquake, we intend to build one more such facility, totaling three, to respond to these issues.

- **Challenges for reconstruction**

- **What does reconstruction consist of for persons with disabilities?**

For persons with disabilities, reconstruction involves returning the situation to the same condition as it was prior to the Earthquake in terms of both physical and mental aspects, as well as improving this situation. Minamisoma City has devised a plan for reconstruction, but a regional support system is necessary for persons with disabilities living in the region. In addition, the immediate reopening of inpatient facilities, outpatient facilities and medical institutions is also linked to reconstruction.

- **Regarding the participation of organizations of persons with disabilities in devising a plan for reconstruction and its implementation**

The participation of organizations of and persons with disabilities in devising a plan for reconstruction is necessary. However, the current plan has unfortunately been devised through the participation of representatives from various organizations, without the participation of persons with disabilities themselves or members of organizations of person with disabilities. In future plan development, the participation by organizations of persons with disabilities and persons with disabilities themselves is essential.



Temporary housing for victims of the Earthquake (Minamisoma City)
(This photograph was not used in the report.)