

T O P I C S

Childrearing Support at the Area Affected by the Great East Japan Earthquake

1 Situation regarding children in the Great East Japan Earthquake

The Great East Japan Earthquake occurred in March 11, 2011 causing an unprecedented damage. The number of dead people who were recovered and subjected to an autopsy in the most damage-stricken 3 prefectures of Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima was 15,824 people as of February 28, 2017, and the number of identified people was 15,755 people, while children in the ages of 0 to 9 years were 469 and those in the ages of 10 to 19 were 425. Of children who lost their parents in the earthquake, 241 children were orphaned (94 in Iwate Prefecture, 126 in Miyagi Prefecture, and 21 in Fukushima Prefecture) and 1,514 children lost both parents (488 in Iwate Prefecture, 871 in Miyagi Prefecture, and 155 in Fukushima Prefecture) (as of March 1, 2014). The number of children who were transferred from the schools in the areas of seriously damaged prefectures (Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima) to other areas was 17,644. Those figures included 746 from kindergartens, 157 from kindergarten and day-care joint type accredited children centers, 10,082 from elementary schools, 5,220 from junior high schools, 1,243 from senior high schools, 11 from compulsory education schools, 19 from secondary schools, and 166 from schools for special needs (including divisions for pre-school age, elementary school age, junior high school age and senior high school age) (As of May 1, 2016. Total of national and private schools. The number includes the children moved to the schools in the same prefecture). Among 17,644 children who went to schools in Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima Prefectures, 9,161 moved to the outside of these prefectures. They were 225 from Iwate Prefecture, 1,088 from Miyagi Prefecture and 7,848 from Fukushima Prefecture (as of May 1, 2016, total of national and private schools). In addition, 941 kindergartens, 3,269 elementary schools, 1,700 junior high schools, 7 secondary schools and 186 special needs education schools sustained physical damage (as of September 14, 2012).

2 Efforts to deal with children and childrearing in areas affected by the Great East Japan Earthquake

(1) Promotion of support to children based on the Comprehensive Disaster Victims Support Measures (Health and Livelihood Support)

In the task force consisting of bureau-chief-level members of relevant ministries with the Minister for Reconstruction as the chairman, the “Comprehensive Disaster Victims Support Measures (Health and Livelihood Support)” was formulated on January 23, 2015. In the Comprehensive Measures, as one of the main support instruments to children affected by the disaster in a variety of manners, a variety of support services are provided to children, including the provision of a comprehensive support to children affected by the disaster from the “Comprehensive Subsidy to Support Victims’ Health and Livelihood” and the implementation of continuous efforts for the mental health care and learning support.

(2) Efforts to create “New Tohoku”

Before the earthquake, the Tohoku region had a variety of problems including population decline, aging, hollowing out of industry, etc. For this reason, efforts are underway to create “New Tohoku” which may serve as a model for Japan and other countries in the world by not only recovering simply to the previous state, but also by overcoming these problems in the wake of the reconstruction from the earthquake disaster. Specifically, the “New Tohoku” leading model project designed to support the acceleration of pioneering efforts by a wide variety of people from companies, universities and NPOs among others was implemented (the project was terminated at the end of FY 2015).

In the disaster stricken areas, problems have arisen, such as that children play less outdoors, people suffer from stress due to the change in livelihood circumstances, etc. In order to solve these problems, it is important to push forward

the creation of a secure society in which energetic and healthy children can grow through the creation of places where children can stay and play (playgrounds and sporting grounds) and through the development of human resources capable of helping children grow from both the physical and mental perspectives.

In a project of the “New Tohoku” leading model project of FY 2015, in order to expand the activity to create children’s playgrounds to a variety of areas as a sustainable effort, efforts that contribute to the rehabilitation of local communities are being made, such as the creation of playgrounds by making use of a shared space in public restoration housing and of playgrounds by making use of agricultural environment.

3 Cases of support for childrearing in areas affected by the disaster

In areas affected by the disaster of the Great East Japan Earthquake, local governments, Specified Nonprofit Corporations and volunteer organizations are providing continued support to children and parents with children.

Grief Program for Children and Parents Who Lost Their Loved Ones (Iwate Prefecture) [Grief support]

A specified non-profit corporation, Kodomo (Children) Grief Support Station conducts their grief program (hereinafter, Program) to children and their families who have been suffered from loss experience such as losing parents and loved ones (by earthquake, illness, accident, suicide, etc.) With their projects, Kodomo Grief Support Station is aiming to contribute to children and their family members to improve their quality of life (QOL) and connect them to the society to improve quality of future (QOF) as well as creating the society where wide range of people support each other.

The previous group of Kodomo Grief Support Station, Sendai Grief Care Kenkyukai (Panel) started the Program from December 2010 in Sendai City. Prompted by the participation of children and parents who lost their loved ones in the Great East Japan Earthquake in this Program, the group obtained the qualification to be a special non-profit corporation in 2013 and started their activities also in Rikuzentakata City in Iwate Prefecture.

[Providing places where children feel comfortable and safe]

Every resident living in the coastal regions in Iwate Prefecture experienced big loss from the earthquake and their community, the basis of their livelihood, has been constantly changing even now.

For example, there have been ongoing socially unstable conditions such as restricting people to enter flooded area from tsunami, large-sized vehicles coming and going, lacking places for children to play safely and comfortably because temporary housing are built in schoolyards and parks, and acceleration of population drain, aging of society and depopulation.

In their Program, members of Kodomo Grief Support Station set up rules to keep children’s safety and comfort as well as play equipment. Children can freely talk, play or do nothing to spend time with these members. Adjusting the ways children choose to spend their time, adults trained by Kodomo Grief Support Station stay with each child and listen to them talking about their home, school, close people they lost, earthquake, town, and memories in proper timing and method (through play and conversation) valuing getting involved with respect to each child and their pace.

Starting from June 2013, the Program has been held twice a month at the community space built in Rikuzentakata City (since FY 2015, it also has been held at a different facility in the same city), and starting FY 2016, horseback riding and overnight stay are included in the Program.

Additionally, the Program has been regularly held in the cities of Kamaishi, Miyako and Morioka in cooperation with Iwate Prefecture since FY 2014.



Playing a board game and getting familiar with each other.



A member from Kodomo Grief Support Station stays close with a child playing piano.



Releasing stress without hurting others and self.
An adult member receives the child's feeling.

Providing Stronger Support by Consolidating Facilities Engaged with Child Support (Miyagi Prefecture)

[New issues entailed in the change of child rearing environment]

Yamamoto-cho, located at the southern coastal area of Miyagi Prefecture, received serious damage as they lost a lot of residents from tsunami caused by the Great East Japan Earthquake and approximately 40% of the town, which counted about 2,500 households, suffered from flood. As their child rearing environment had largely changed, new problems were raised by increasing stress and anxiety among families with children. This condition required a developed system to provide deliberate support to families with young children and child development from broad viewpoint.

[Consolidating facilities engaged with child rearing and creating the hub]

In summer of 2016, Childrearing Support Area was created as a hub of childrearing support in the town. The area includes Yamamoto-cho Tsubame-no-mori Central Park, Yamamoto Municipal Yamashita Daini Elementary School, Yamamoto-cho Tsubame-no-mori Nursery School, which is a U-shape building centered around the schoolyard with lawn, and Yamamoto-cho Kodomo (Children) Center. This Kodomo Center is a circular form building comprised of 3 functions; Children's Hall, Child Rearing Support Center, and After-school Children's Clubs.



The entire view of Child Rearing Support Area



Schoolyard of Yamamoto-cho Tsubame-no-mori Nursery School

Visitors to the Kodomo Center is over 1,100 every month, and it is apparent that the center is effectively functioning as a safe and comfortable place for holding activities involved in children as well as having exchange among the families with children.

In the interviews conducted to childrearing support groups after the earthquake, it was pointed out that difficulty lies in supporting "mothers who shut themselves up at their homes" rather than the parents who had been participating in gatherings and meetings of child rearing generations to exchange information.

With this voice, the town decided to hold events and classes about raising babies and toddlers at Kodomo Center for parents to ease up their anxiety about child rearing and exchange their information with each other. Each event's information is sent to each family as well as published on public information papers and town's website. Also, health nurses actively tell mothers about those information at the time of children's health check. The contents of these events and classes are chosen from the subjects that young parents and their children are interested in, such as Baby Massage Class¹ and exhibition of model railroad. Also, instructors for classes are selected in a way to attract more parents. With these efforts, the center has contributed more to establish the environment for parents to raise their children safely as mothers who hadn't usually visited Kodomo Center started to visit there more.

Additionally, Kodomo Center is working on establishing the opportunities to have exchange between the community and childrearing parents'

generation, asking local people to join their events such as puppet theaters, concerts, and sumo experience and sometimes asks local people to be instructors of their events teaching calligraphy, shogi, and tea ceremony. In future, it is necessary to further expand the network of child rearing support from formal effort to multi-layered support by entire community including residents' autonomous support activities.



Yamamoto-cho Kodomo (Children) Center



Baby Massage class

Playing in Nature Project for Small Children (Fukushima Prefecture)

[Establishing the environment for children to experience outdoor play and touch the nature]

In Fukushima Prefecture, children's outdoor play has been limited due to the anxious condition of radioactive material emission caused by the nuclear plant accident. Because of this, decline of children's physical fitness and increase of obese children have become concern. On the other hand, importance of outdoor play and experience to touch nature have been re-recognized for healthy physical and mental development. Not long after the earthquake, there were plans to establish indoor play areas in the prefecture and to experience playing outdoor in the places outside Fukushima Prefecture where less radioactive material was measured. However, after 5 years from the earthquake, decontamination has advanced in local areas in

the prefecture and plans for children to play outdoor have been gradually raised.

[Conducting events continuously through a year]

Fukushima Prefecture opened Forest Park Adatara, a woods for prefectural residents' (total area is 91.5 hectares) in 1972 in the middle of prefecture owned land (Otama Village of Adachi-gun) and provided the place for children to learn the ways to coexist in nature through learning at the facility in woods and auto-camping site. Since May 2016, the prefecture commissioned its designated superintendent, Fukushima Forest Eco Life Foundation to plan and operate the project Chibikko Shizen Asobi Jigyo (Playing in nature project for young children) for pre-school age children to freely play and experience activities in nature.

To this day, the foundation has conducted about 30 various programs about learning from experience, observation of living things and camping using facilities in Forest Park Adatara, matching each season through a year. These programs include "Working experience in the woods – Harvest honey in Spring," "Family camping that young children can enjoy (1) - First overnight stay in a tent and bake Baumkuhen," "Night hike," "Family camping that young children can enjoy (3) – Enjoy open fire and roasting sweet potatoes," and "Young explorers in nature – Walking in woods covered by snow and riding sleigh." Each program takes 10 sets of parents and children, and many of them had more applicants.

They will continue to hold these programs for parents and children living in the prefecture to have opportunities to play outdoor and experience communicating with nature. In FY 2017, 30 or so projects are planned to be held again.

[Voice from participants]

○ Working experience in the woods - Collect honey in Spring (Sunday, May 29, 2016)

I wanted my child to experience harvesting honey, which you cannot experience in daily life. I thought it was scary to see a lot of bees and difficult to go near them, but my child harvested honey without being scared and looked satisfied. I felt it was a good experience for my child.

(Mother)

○ Young explorers in nature – Looking for insects in summer woods (Sunday, August 7, 2016)

¹ Baby massage class is going into the 3rd year and has become very popular. Among the opinions of participants, one mother stated, "My baby seemed like enjoying it and I felt yet closer to my child. I was thinking about giving massage to my 2-year-old child, too."

Section 1 Support for each different stage of marriage, pregnancy and childbirth and childcare

I don't like insects, but I want my child to have an experience to catch and touch insects. That's why we participated in. (Mother)

○ Night hike (Friday, August 12, 2016)

I thought my child was scared of dark place, but I was surprised to see my child eagerly looking for beetles with flashlight and living things in a pond. (Mother)

