Hot Welfare Information Magazine
HEARTFULL FUKUSHIMA
SUPPLEMENTARY ISSUE
Fukushima Disaster Volunteer Center Magazine
Vol.5 May 23, 2011

Support coming from all over the country!

All kinds of people from all over the country come to support various locations in Fukushima. Here are some messages from two of them.

Head of crisis volunteer,
assistant to the prime minister
Kiyomi Tsujimoto

I am truly sorry for what happened to everyone suffered from this Tohoku crisis. As the assistant to the prime minister, I am here to organize volunteer groups and work with them to support the people in need. I have visited Fukushima twice before, and going forward, I would like to keep on supporting and working with people in Fukushima (for a speedy recovery).

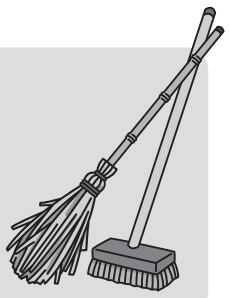
Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary
(to liaise with the crisis volunteer groups)
Makoto Yuasa

This is my third visit to Fukushima. With the earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear leakage crisis, one can only imagine the hardship everyone in Fukushima is suffering. Although what I can do is limited, I will do whatever I can to support and work on a speedy recovery. I will come back for more visits going forward, and please know that my heart goes out for all of you.

Volunteer work - before, during, and after

To all volunteers in Fukushima now - thank you very much for your kind work. Here are a few things to better help you with your volunteering.

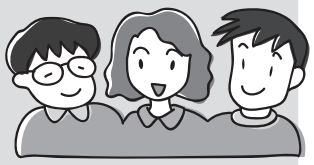
Before you volunteer:



What you need for volunteering differs on the area and timing you volunteer. It is a MUST for you to get as much information as possible prior to volunteering. Although it is very useful to learn from people who have volunteered, their experience and stories can be limited to certain situations and may not apply in your case. Even if you have volunteered in the area before, if you volunteered in a different time, the situation can be very different as it is constantly changing. In addition, some areas look very differently from what was shown on TV immediately after the earthquake. Therefore it is vital to get as much "real time" information as possible before volunteering.

While you volunteer:

You are the one responsible for your own health and safety, so TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF is the ground rule for volunteering in disaster-stricken areas. Local residences are the core of the recovery and the reason why volunteering work exists, so it is important to keep in mind that volunteers and volunteering work do not bring more burdens on top of the recovery work. As the recovery progressed, volunteers with the aforementioned mindset will gain the trust easier, which makes the volunteering more rewarding. Therefore "overly friendly" and "emotional dependence" are unhealthy to the recovery. Also, don't try to solve everything on your own. Talking to staffs in the volunteering centers or sharing your experience and thoughts are very important. Don't forget to take regular breaks or "day off" – if you are not healthy, you cannot help others.



After you volunteered:

It is common to have critical incident stress after seeing and volunteering in a disaster site. Over excitement, insomnia, frustration, flashback of the disastrous scenes, feeling of helplessness, and depression are some of the syndromes. These are normal physical reactions. Speak to someone and take a break can help calm you down, and if the situation prolonged and started affecting your daily life, contact your nearby hospital or speak to a counselor.

For people in shelter

For your mental health...

Takako Okawa, the expert in mental health nursing science from the School of Nursing in Fukushima Medical University

Making "rest" part of your job

It is easy to imagine that there are many people who have not slept or rested well after the crisis, because they are forced to deal with what had happened to them. Perhaps it is difficult for many people to take a break during the crisis. Also, the Japanese has a saying of "kajiba no bakachikara", or the "hidden power" that only comes up during a crisis, and that keeps people on a "false" natural high, which caused many to think they can keep on doing what they are doing without any rest.

However, this could be very dangerous if we let the "hidden power" run wild. Human beings are controlled by two main nerves – the sympathetic nerve which keeps us active during the day, and the parasympathetic nerve which sends us to bed at the end of the day. When the two nerves interchange smoothly, we are able to switch from "on" to "off" and that keeps us healthy. When the sympathetic nerve is on all the time, we are "tricked" into the false impression that we can go on without any rest, which can lead to severe health problems if the status prolonged.

In fact, I was the one being told to take a break by my boss and colleagues, and I took three days off during the Golden Week. I was extremely exhausted on my first day off, and I thought maybe I was better off not taking any break and I should keep working. However, it also means I was not aware how tired I was and it was obvious that I needed the time off. After my three-day break, my body felt better and my heart was much at ease. I strongly encourage everyone to work around your family and work schedules, and to take at least a two-day break (for your mental health) every now and then.

Enriching your everyday life with small items.

Are you able to secure sometime for yourself in your daily life, or do you have anything that brings you back to who you were before the crisis? As a woman, taking care of your skin and/or putting on your favorite dress are just some ways to cheer yourself up, or bring you back your "old self". I understand that many people are under severe financial situation, and spending money on these items is luxury they cannot afford now; however, it is very important to have something that enriches your everyday life, or cheers you up. Whether it is a bottle of moisturizers you used to apply before the crisis, or a new T-shirt that you like (which also fits the coming season), get it for yourself. It may appear to be a waste of money on the surface, but it is important to "be yourself" from the mental health point of view.

It helps to talk about your feelings.

As one of the members in the mental health care team in Fukushima Medical University, it is part of my job to visit shelters as well as houses. Throughout my experience, I feel it is important to talk about what you have been through, and feelings you got out of your experience. Some people have to relocate and move into a shelter with a large crowd, and this can be very stressful as well. It helps to share the heartbreaking feelings and frustration, and many people have told me after an one-hour session, that they felt much better and calmer after talking about their feelings in the session. If you feel stressed out and you need someone to talk to, please feel free to contact one of your nearby mental care teams for more help.

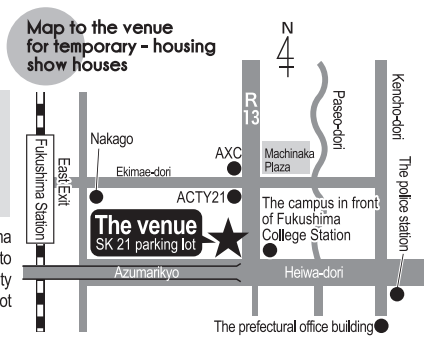
Open house tour for temporary housing is available now!

Hosted by Fukushima Construction Association

These are temporary houses under construction (some people have moved in already). If you are interested in learning more about the houses – how does it feel? What are the washroom and bathroom like? Please feel free to drop by and take a look yourself.

The open house tour is available every day from 9:00am through 5:00pm.
The last day is Saturday, June

※Please note the show homes are built by the Fukushima Construction Association, and may differ from community to community depending on the homebuilder your community chooses. Please understand that the show homes are not necessarily 100% of what you will get.



Heartfull Fukushima special edition is available in multi-language now!

The Heartfull Fukushima multi-language (English, Mandarin, Korean, Portuguese, and Tagalog) special edition is available on our website.

■Special thanks to Multilanguage Center Facil.

Editor's note:

The school my third-grader twin boys attend is half-dysfunction because of the crisis, and they are sharing the gym as their new classroom with six graders. I am happy to see that they seem to enjoy their new classroom and school life, and this gives me great relief. (by Tomomichi)

赤い羽根共同募金

Let's persevere, Japan
Let's persevere, Tohoku
Let's persevere, Fukushima

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