

ROAD TO RECOVERY

Earthquake Updates by JWCU
Japan Workers' Co-operative Union
February 24, 2012

From the Frontline

Born from the Disaster Experience: Emergency Rescue Box Now on Sale!

When the earthquake and tsunami hit Tohoku region last March, thousands of people were isolated, and it took a few days for rescue teams to arrive. Based on their experience of surviving the devastating disaster, people in Onagawa City (Miyagi Prefecture) have developed “Emergency Rescue Box” that will help us survive the first 3 days, the hardest time, of the disaster. JWCU member “Bihoro” has become one of the agents to sell this product.

The box (8,400 yen) contains: 15 packaged foods (good for 5 years), 6 x 200ml water, plastic utensils, spoons, straws, wet towels, dry face towels, plastic bags, baby wipes and sheets to absorb urine. The box itself can be used as a toilet.

We will never know when a disaster will hit us!



New Vocational Training Program in Kesennuma, Miyagi

On January 23, 2012, JWCU Tohoku Reconstruction Head Office started a new vocational training program to become care workers in Kesennuma City, Miyagi Prefecture. There are 18 trainees, most of whom have lost their jobs due to the disaster.



On the first day, the trainees introduced themselves and presented their aspirations, including: “I believe many people need care especially since the earthquake. I want to help these people,” “I had worked in fishing industry for 15 years but the earthquake took that job away. Since I like helping older people, I have decided to take this training. This is a totally different field for me, but I want to do my best,” and “My previous workplace was washed away by tsunami, but JWCU member’s smile lifted my soul. I want to study care and welfare as my first step to rejoin the society.”

After several months of the training course, the trainees are to start their own care agency to rebuild community.

Bringing the Community Together: Progress Report from Tome City, Miyagi

As mentioned in our October and December issues, a vocational training program started in Tome City, Miyagi Prefecture, in October. As part of the program, the trainees are conducting community assessment at temporary housing to hear the residents’ voices that would bring hints to create useful jobs. In order to bring as many people as possible to hear their voices, the trainees organized a mobile shop and singing café at the temporary housing.

The trainees made the best of their own network to make this happen. Some of them actually live in temporary housing, and they realized that many of their neighbors are older people who have difficulties in shopping. Another member knows people who grow vegetables. So the trainees decided to put these vegetables in a truck, bring them to the temporary housing and sell them. For the residents who were too frail to go out, the trainees delivered the vegetables to their houses. The trainees also held an event to provide oral care (with dentists’ cooperation) and exercise programs, which brought 37 people. For the singing café, several women in the temporary housing joined the café not only as customers but also as cooking volunteers.



These activities are the first step for the trainees to get to know the community residents, build relationships with them, and understand their needs. They will keep building trust with the community residents and move to the next step to actually start a cooperative that will benefit the community.

Christmas in Tohoku

Although few Japanese people are religious, a holiday season is still special for us. During the Christmas season, JWCU members organized and joined holiday events for the community residents in the quake-hit areas. These are not only for residents to have fun and gifts but also for our members to introduce worker coops, hear voices of the residents, and build trust with the residents.

<Tome City, Miyagi Prefecture>



As reported in the last issue (December 2011), the trainees of the vocational program in Tome City have conducted community assessment to understand the needs of temporary housing residents. Based on these residents' voices, the trainees organized Christmas events at several temporary housing sites on December 25th.

The program at one of the temporary housing sites included Karaoke contest (requested by residents), hand massage course and exercise program. At the other housing site, 120 people joined the event, and some residents helped cooking for the party.

Our members also delivered relief goods in a snow storm. They were greeted with residents' words of appreciation, and our members were also able to learn about their further needs, including general shops and temporary staff services.

<Kesenuma City, Miyagi Prefecture>

On December 24th, JWCU members joined the opening event of "Kesenuma City Revival Shopping Center." In one of its opening spaces, JWCU's vocational training started in late January (please see above for details).

Using a cart, our members, both in Tohoku region and from across the country, gave out relief goods (e.g. oranges, snacks) at the event. It was also a great opportunity to introduce the worker coop to the community residents.



Members dressed as Santa Clause and reindeers to give out oranges

Nationwide Support

Connecting People across the Country through Rice

Tohoku (northeastern) region is famous for delicious rice. But this season, many rice fields there were damaged by the earthquake and tsunami. Meanwhile, JWCU members in southern part of Japan started growing rice in recent years for various reasons, and some of them have decided to send the rice they grew to people in Tohoku region.

<JWCU Center Jigyodan Kagoshima Area>

As reported in our August issue, young members of JWCU Center Jigyodan Kagoshima Area launched “Go Go Kagoshima Project” to grow rice and send it to Tohoku region last year. On December 5th, its 4 members visited Kesennuma City (Miyagi Prefecture) to deliver their rice. It was a day before introducing a vocational training program there, and the members cooked their rice as well as soup for the temporary housing residents. At first the members expected about 50 people, but the turnout was so great that they ended up providing 100 meals.



On the next day, these 4 members helped distributing the vocational program flyers at temporary housing. The members were so shocked to see the damaged area that was washed away by the tsunami. They will never forget what they have seen and experienced in Tohoku.

<Hikari Jigyodan, Yamaguchi Prefecture>



Hikari (“Hikari” means “Light”) Jigyodan (in Yamaguchi Prefecture) started growing rice in 2009 to promote self sufficiency of foods among its members. Learning about the devastating earthquake, the members launched “The Light of Hope Rice Project” with community residents to grow rice to support Tohoku region.

In late November, the members brought their rice to Ishinomaki Jigyodan (fellow JWCU

member whose office was washed away by the tsunami). They drove a whole day to deliver 60kg of their rice. The next day, the members in Ishinomaki and Hikari Jigyodans had an event with community residents to make and enjoy sticky rice cakes.

<Child Care Support Center in Kagoshima Prefecture>

In Kagoshima Prefecture, JWCU members run a child care support center “Honobono,” where children grow their own rice. They harvested 100kg this year and decided to donate part of it (about 16kg) to support Tohoku region.

The members talked with children and decided to put children’s messages on rice packages, including: “You’re not alone. We are all with you. So everything will be all right,” “Not everything is fun, but not everything is pain either” and “The more pain we go through, the more fun we have.”

The rice was delivered for a Christmas event in Tohoku (please see above for details).



- Endnote -

The first anniversary is coming in a few weeks.

These 12 months since March 11th, 2011, have been filled with losses, pain and sorrow. Yet, it was also the time for us to realize the warmth and support of our global friends. Please allow us to express our deepest gratitude for all the support you have given us.

Thanks to all of you, we are steadily moving forward. While relief efforts are still going on, the focus is gradually shifting to reconstruction of and job creation in the quake-hit areas by the disaster victims themselves, and JWCU is there to support them.

Hopefully, we will be able to bring good news about new cooperatives formed in the quake-hit areas by the vocational training program graduates in the next issue!

