

ROAD TO RECOVERY

Earthquake Updates by JWCU
Japan Workers' Co-operative Union
February 15, 2013

Time flies.

Nearly 2 years have passed since the massive quake and tsunami.

As we have been reporting, JWCU members have been working hard to rebuild the quake-hit areas mainly through job training programs and job creation. In this issue, we are excited to announce that the first new enterprise was launched by our job training graduates. In this issue, we are also sharing not-so-good experiences as well. We are not proud, but we are hoping that you can learn something from our bitter experiences too.

From the Frontline: Moving Forward

Vocational Training (in Kesennuma City, Miyagi Prefecture)

As reported in our August 2012 issue, the 2nd round training course started in June 2012 with 17 students, and all of them crossed the finish line on October 24, 2012.

At the graduation ceremony, the trainees made presentations on their accomplishments, including the bags and chairs they developed based on the discussion they had on the future of Kesennuma. The following are some of the graduates' comments on the final day.



- “Since I lost my job after the quake, my life had been filled with anxiety. But thanks to this course, I was able to take the first step to move forward.”
- “I’d like to use the knowledge and skills I’ve learned in the last 4 months for the welfare in Kesennuma community.”

Getting Ready to Start New Business

< Power of GAGA: in Ishinomaki City, Miyagi Prefecture >

What? GAGA? Lady?

Well, in Ishinomaki area, GAGA means “Mama” or “Mother.” So, “Power of GAGA” means

“Power of Mama.”

This project started on September 15th, 2012, with 13 new worker coop members, mostly women and GAGAs, to create jobs in the areas of food production, farmers market and community development.

Ishinomaki area had been famous for fishery and seafood processing. But since the earthquake and tsunami, only 30% of the 300 seafood-processing facilities have been restarted, leaving a number of women out of job. These women wanted to work in seafood processing badly but did not know where to start. In response, JWCU submitted a proposal to Ishinomaki City in July 2012 so that women and older people in Ishinomaki can create their own jobs in Tofu-making, which JWCU members



already had extensive skills in, and seafood processing. The plan was approved in August. These new members take a few-month training, with a goal to launch an independent enterprise by April 2013. The following are comments by the GAGA members:

- “I had been doing nothing but watching TV and eating sweets. Before I knew it, I gained 6.5kg. I said to myself, this is no good. I’m 69 years old, but I thought there must be something I could do. That was when I found the GAGA project flyer, and I thought, this is it!”
- “My house was totally destroyed. Things were finally calming down and I started looking for something to cheer me up. That was when I saw the GAGA flyer.”
- “I have a 14-year-old daughter who is kind of withdrawn. I think mother should be a role model to cheer up. The GAGA project seemed real energetic and dynamic, so I applied for this project. I’m glad I could become part of this.”

< Forest for Everyone: Bihoro in Onagawa Town, Miyagi Prefecture >

As reported in the August 2012 issue, a JWCU member organization Bihoro (in Onagawa Town, Miyagi Prefecture) is in process of starting “Forest for Everyone,” a comprehensive model to develop a community, including housing, day care for the elderly, after-school programs, community hall, restaurant and biodiesel energy plant.

In order to move ahead with the plan, the members held a meeting with 8 landowners on August 11th, 2012. Some of the landowners had initially had doubts about this plan, but they have become more cooperative as Bihoro members kept talking with them and as they saw a number of people leaving the town.



The members also held “Forest for Everyone Promotion Meeting” on November 10th, 2012, bringing about 60 people in the community. While Bihoro founded “Forest for Everyone Promotion Council” to obtain the land and cooperation from various people, they still have halfway to go. This meeting was held to call for further participation and cooperation of the community residents. A town councilor who attended the meeting said, “The biggest challenges we are facing in reconstruction are housing and employment. Forest for Everyone will create places to work, so I’m counting on this project. We’d like to support this.”

Launch of New Worker Coop in Tohoku

<Day Care Center for the Elderly: in Tome City, Miyagi Prefecture>

As reported in the August 2012 issue, the graduates of a job training program in Tome City have been working hard to launch their own worker coop. One of the 5 teams, elder care team, has finally opened a day care center for the elderly on December 1st, 2012. Seventy people attended its opening ceremony, including Mayor, who commented, “I hope this Center becomes a place where people can make dreams and hopes come true.”



Before the launch, the team members organized a series of mini-day care and tours as well as a festival to build relationships with the community. They also met with community leaders to understand what is needed in this community.

One of the members says, “I hope people come to this Center and become healthy even without realizing it. We’d also like to open this space in the morning for the public to mingle. I hope we can revitalize this community with people who live here.”

Their plans are to open another enterprise to support people with disabilities in January 2013 and an after-school program for children with disabilities in March. Their goal: to play a role as a hub to build a welfare and self-sustaining community.

Listening to the Voices of Communities (in Otsuchi Town, Iwate Prefecture)

As reported in the August 2012 issue, our members in Otsuchi Town launched “Citizens’ Congress for Reconstruction” in June 2012. The members held the total of 5 meetings by November 2012, bringing a wide range of people with energy and passion to rebuild the community.

The second meeting was held on August 15th, 2012. The 28 participants shared the challenges as well as their dreams.

Challenges included: delayed reconstruction schedules, potential difficulties for older people to live in an apartment, danger of losing the local culture and tradition, staff shortage in child and elder care, and a number of people who are leaving the town.

The participants also shared their dreams to start such enterprises as Tofu-making, energy production (biodiesel), businesses by effectively using local woods and care, so that they can make Otsuchi Town the place people feel like living and raising their children.

These ideas were further explored in the 3rd (September 10th) and 4th (October 14th and 15th) meetings, and the members decided to launch 5 projects: welfare, rapeseeds project, woods and houses, water and Tofu, and seafood. Each team presented its progress in the 5th meeting (November 26th). For example, the welfare team has visited day care centers, comprehensive support center for the elderly, and parents of children with disabilities in order to learn about the current conditions and challenges facing this community.



From the Frontline: Bitter Lessons

Yes, we are moving forward. But things are not always rosy. The road to recovery is indeed a bumpy one, and we have also learned lessons from bitter experiences.

In several towns, our members tried to start job training programs but could not find enough trainees. There are several possible reasons for this. For example, in the case of Ishinomaki City (Miyagi Prefecture), our members initially planned a job training program to become home care workers. However, only 3-4 people applied for the program while we tried to recruit 20 people. Why? This community’s major industry was seafood processing, and many women were also working in this field. They wanted to work, but caring job was not for them. After this bitter experience, our members came up with a different program, which led to “Power of GAGA” project (see page 2).

In Minami Soma City (Fukushima Prefecture), the same problem happened: only a few people applied for a job training program to become home care workers, which was supposed to hold 20 students. But their situation was a bit different: many people who stay in this area are losing motivation to work. Yet, our members have not given up. They are trying to find other ways to involve community residents and to work with them so that they can rebuild a community with their own hands. These experiences have given us lessons to take a close look



at what the communities need before developing plans.

In Ohfunato City (Iwate Prefecture), we reported in the August 2012 issue that the graduates of our job training program were preparing for a new enterprise. But things did not go as expected, and they had to give up on this plan. The lesson we learned here is the importance of developing a feasible plan and to achieve the true cooperation with the community so that we can actually make it happen with the community residents.

Nationwide Support

Festival in Tokyo to Support Evacuees from Fukushima

Even after 2 years, thousands of people are still living as evacuees. As reported in the October 2011 issue, Koto City in eastern part of Tokyo has also taken some of them.

Currently, 1,200 evacuees from the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Plant accident live in the City's public workers' housing in Shinonome district, and JWCU members, particularly those who operate an after-school program in the City, are actively working with them.

On September 8th, 2012, JWCU members held "Shinonome Festival" and brought over 100



people, including a number of evacuees. This festival was also the 17th "Parents' Plaza" for the young families who have evacuated from Fukushima. But the members decided to organize much more than that to make it an opportunity for all the generations to have a great time together. The event was co-organized by groups of evacuees from Fukushima (Kids Smile Project and Shinonome Club). Some grandparents came all the way from Fukushima to see their grandchildren at the festival.

The event was full of fun, including: plays and dances by children, chorus, Japanese traditional dance performance, and magic show by evacuees.

After the festival, the members heard such comments as: "I had been down since I lost my mother. But meeting with these people have cheered me up," and "I have been through so much sorrow, but I like to leave some fun memories for our kids."

Safe Drinking Water for Kids in Fukushima

Workers' Coop Chiba (JWCU member) launched "Food Bank Chiba" in June 2012 to effectively redistribute surplus foods to those who truly need them.

Considering the situation in Fukushima (still quite difficult), Workers' Coop Chiba decided to deliver 2 tons of drinking water to NPOs and a nursery in Soma City, Fukushima, in the summer of 2012.



Delivering Warm Scarves and Hearts to Tohoku

Members of Center Jigyodan (JWCU member) Kawagoe Branch (Saitama Prefecture) have wanted to support Tohoku, especially since they heard stories of fellow JWCU members in the quake-hit areas at the 2012 JWCU general assembly in June. They discussed over and over what they might be able to do. "What about volunteering there?" "Nahhh, we are too old (most of the members are in their late 60s)." "How about donating money?" "We won't know for sure whether the money actually reaches the victims." After the several discussions, the idea of knitting scarves came up because it gets quite cold in Tohoku.



Using the award money they had received from Center Jigyodan, the members in Kawagoe purchased yarns and started knitting in July 2012. They finally made 205 scarves, and these scarves were delivered to temporary houses in Ishinomaki and Tome Cities in mid-December, 2012.

International Exchanges

Sharing Experiences in Disaster Reconstruction: Chief Organizer of ACORN International Visited JWCU

On October 16th and 17th, 2012, the Chief Organizer of ACORN International, Mr. Wade Rathke, who has been making efforts to reconstruct communities through community organizing severely affected by flooding in New Orleans in 2005, visited JWCU to learn about JWCU's reconstruction efforts.

On 16th, Mr. Rathke visited JWCU headquarters to exchange opinions with Yuzo Nagato (President of JWCU) and Toru Fujita (Vice President of JWCU) about reconstruction efforts of

the Great Hanshin Earthquake, the Great East Japan Earthquake and the flooding in New Orleans.

After this meeting, he visited JWCU Tohoku Reconstruction Head Office in Miyagi Prefecture to learn about situations in affected areas and JWCU's reconstruction efforts. The main challenge in New Orleans has been to create jobs, and he was very interested in how JWCU as worker coops creates jobs, what kind of jobs we try to create, and how we cooperate with communities and other organizations.



On 17th, he visited disaster areas in Ishinomaki and Onagawa Cities (Miyagi Prefecture) to see two projects by JWCU member coops: “Power of GAGA (see Page 1-2)” and “Forest for Everyone (see Page 2).”



As Mr. Rathke said, reconstruction is a marathon. Both of us still have a long way to go. We hope to keep sharing our experiences and strengthen our partnership to build a “new society” together!

Our article on JWCU's reconstruction efforts in English was introduced in [Social Policy magazine](http://www.socialpolicy.org/) (<http://www.socialpolicy.org/>) which Mr. Rathke publishes. The full article is available online.

[http://english.roukyou.gr.jp/Article%20for%20Social%20Policy%20\(JWCU\)\(pics%20with%20captions\).pdf](http://english.roukyou.gr.jp/Article%20for%20Social%20Policy%20(JWCU)(pics%20with%20captions).pdf)

National Gatherings of Cooperation: Platform to Promote Cooperation

Since 1987, National Gathering of Cooperation is held every 2 year, under the leadership of JWCU and Japan Institute of Co-operative Research (JWCU member), to bring together people who support promotion of cooperation and creation of a new society. The Gathering is a 2-day event, consisting of plenary sessions (keynote speech and symposium) on Day 1 and section meetings on Day 2, to discuss various issues related to non-profit and cooperative sectors.



The Gathering in 2012 was held in 2 places: in Tohoku region (October 27-28th) to boost the reconstruction process and in Saitama Prefecture to commemorate the International Year of Cooperative (IYC), which was also held in conjunction with Cooperative Festival organized by Japan National Planning Committee for IYC 2012.

The Tohoku Gathering brought about 1,000 people, discussing various issues such as renewable energy, community development, job creation by women, child care and elder care. The Saitama gathering brought nearly 3,000 people, including distinguished international guests like Dr. Johnston Birchall (Scotland) and Dr. Jean-Louis Laville (France). The 20 section meetings covered various issues, including poverty, international cooperative movement, child care, social participation by the elderly, social exclusion and nuclear power plant accident.



Individuals and organizations from a wide range of fields have worked together to make this Gathering happen, including people from various cooperative sectors, NPOs, union workers, students, cultural organizations, researchers and media workers. Some of them serve as members of the steering committee to organize the Gathering, while others join the Gathering as speakers and/or audience.

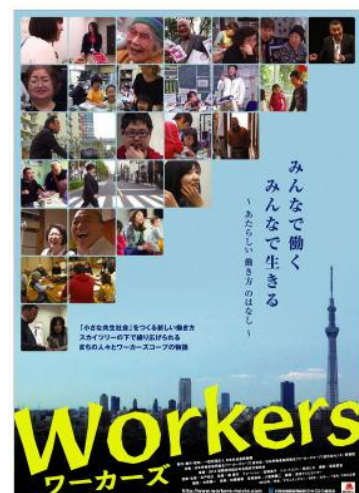
This network of Cooperation is not just for the Gathering. Indeed, the Gathering is only a starting point. In several cities that hosted the Gathering, the steering committee members later established “Associated Work Network” and “Cooperative Network” to create jobs, to build better communities and to promote worker cooperative legislation.

Spreading Messages of Worker Coops to the Society

“Workers”: The Movie on Worker Coops in Japan

We are very excited to announce that JWCU’s documentary film “Workers” is now completed!

This documentary film shows 4 worker coops in downtown Tokyo, letting us rediscover the meaning of “work” and “community.” The worker coops in this film include 2 child centers which cooperate with community residents to support children, 1 senior center where not only worker coop members but also service users play active roles in its operation and activities, and 1 community welfare center



which provides comprehensive support to older people in cooperation with the community.

Pole-Pole Higashi-Nakano, the leading independent movie theater in Tokyo, started showing this movie on February 2nd 2013, and the seats have been filled with viewers since the 1st day. The theater initially planned to show this movie only for 3 weeks, but thanks to its popularity, the theater has decided to extend the screening period for 3 more weeks! We are also encouraging people to organize their own “Workers” screening events.

The movie is currently available only in Japanese, but if you are interested in watching it in English, please contact us!

The trailer (<http://www.workers-movie.com/movie>) is available on “Workers” official web site (<http://www.workers-movie.com/home>, only in Japanese).

Documentary Program on Worker Coops by National TV Station

On February 7th 2013, NHK (national TV station in Japan) broadcasted a 30-minute documentary on worker coops in Japan and across the world at its popular program “Close-up Gendai.” In this time of unstable employment, economic difficulties and failing communities, there has been a growing interest in worker coops as key players in job creation and community development. During the program, 2 enterprises which belong to JWCUC as well as Mondragon in Basque Country were introduced. We would like to thank CECOP-CICOPA Europe for helping NHK obtain information on Mondragon and for letting them use parts of its documentary “[Together](#)” for the program.



After the program, phone kept ringing at JWCUC headquarters, and JWCUC web site server went down because so many people tried to check us out!