

ROAD TO RECOVERY

Earthquake Updates by JWCU
Japan Workers' Co-operative Union
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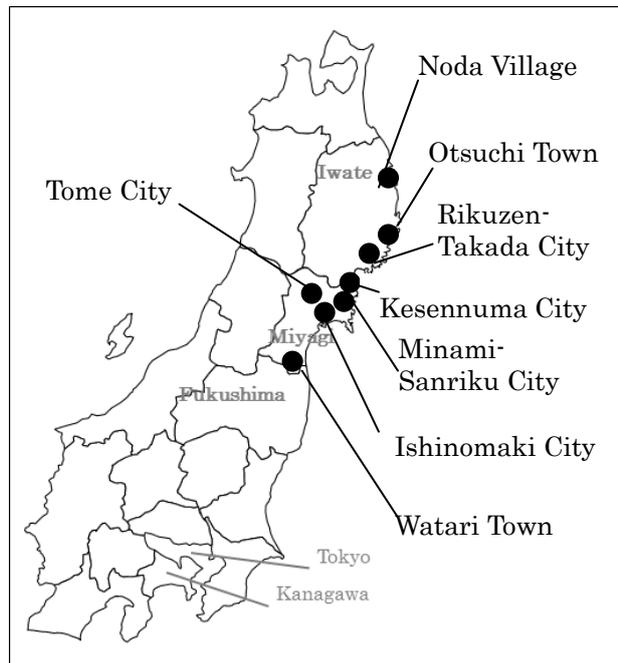
Moving to the Next Step: Job Creation in Disaster-Hit Areas

It has been almost 2.5 years since the disaster, and 2 years since the launch of JWCU Tohoku Reconstruction Head Office. Looking back on these 2.5 years, we realize that we are moving slowly but surely.

In the **Year 1**, our main efforts were (1) **emergency relief** (e.g. goods, foods, money, volunteers, etc.), (2) **building networks** in the disaster-hit communities (e.g. local governments, relevant organizations, residents, etc.), (3) **listening to voices** of the disaster-hit communities to understand their needs through such activities as events, meetings and community assessments, and (4) launching the **Reconstruction Head Office** to coordinate our efforts.

In the **Year 2**, based on the groundwork in Year 1, our members **started preparation** to create jobs that could help reconstruct the disaster-hit communities. A number of municipalities in the region commissioned us to provide **job training which could also lead to job creation by the graduates themselves**. The trainees learned how to create their own jobs and made their own business plans.

Now we are in the **Year 3** and finally beginning to see fruits of these preparatory efforts: the **actual job creation**. A number of new worker coops have been launched by the training graduates, and several more are almost ready to launch. Since most of these communities are in rural areas, these places are blessed with rich natural resources, and the majority of residents had been engaged in the primary industry. Another issue facing these communities is population aging, and there is a growing demand for elder care. As a result, many of the business activities the trainees have prepared are in these fields. In this issue, we would like to introduce some of their efforts.



JWCU's Reconstruction Efforts in Tohoku

New Worker Coops Launched in Disaster-Hit Areas

Day Care Center for the Elderly: 3-Year Dream Comes True (in Noda Village, Iwate Prefecture)

On March 30th, 2013, a day care center for older people “Azubi (meaning “where people get together” in the local dialect)” opened in the central part of Noda Village, where the tsunami washed away most of the buildings 2 years before. The dream of opening Azubi has finally come true after 3 years of planning and struggling with the disaster.



In December 2009, Noda Village commissioned JWCU members to provide a training program to become care workers. The graduates of this program, now worker-members themselves, launched a community welfare center in August 2010, providing care-worker training and community assessments while preparing to launch a day care center. It was in the middle of the planning phase when the disaster hit Tohoku region, including Noda Village, in March 2011. The members lost their homes and needed to rebuild their lives. In July 2011, the members decided to launch a gathering place for relatively healthy older people “Salon Azubi” while utilizing a public emergency fund to create employment. While they had struggled to find a place for the salon (because the tsunami had washed away most of the buildings), they started the program in September 2011. They also started a transportation service for older people in May 2012. And now, finally, the dream of opening a day care center has come true.



Thirty-seven people came to its opening ceremony, including the village mayor and assembly chair. The mayor said, “I was hoping to have a day care center one day, but to be honest, I thought it would be difficult. I am so glad that the graduates of the training program have played key roles in launching this Center. I hope our people will cherish this Center for a long time.”

According to Ms. Osaki, a manager of Azubi, “I was raised by my grandparents, so I think of older people in this community as my family. I hope we can make this Center like their own home where they can relax.”

Farmers Market: Where People Can Buy, Sell and Bond (in Rikuzen-Takada City, Iwate Prefecture)

On March 7th, 2013, JWCU members opened a farmers market “Rin-Noh-Kai (meaning “forest, farming and ocean” in Chinese characters)” in the middle of the disaster-hit area in Rikuzen-Takada City, Iwate Prefecture. The goal is to create a place where people in the community can get together, sell vegetables and pickles they make, have others appreciate their products, and get a sense of Ikigai (meaning “purposes of life, life worth living” in Japanese). The community residents appreciate this new shop, saying “It’s great to have a place like this where we can get together” and “It’s nice to be able to find local fish here.” Since the shop is located right next to a Karaoke place, many healthy older people also stop by the shop after enjoying Karaoke-singing.



For some people, though, the shop can be a bit too far (about 20-minute walk). Recognizing the needs of these people, our members started a mobile store. They load the truck with vegetables, cooked fish and spices, and they drive to temporary housing for disaster victims in 3 locations. Knowing when our members are coming, the temporary housing residents wait outside for the truck, looking forward to the mobile store. Our members do not forget to listen to the voices of these people, such as “My house is so small that I can’t even grill fish. I want to buy grilled fish!” to improve and expand their activities to further respond to the community’s needs.



Day Care for the Elderly, Food Processing, and More! (in Tome City, Miyagi Prefecture)

As reported in the February 2013 issue, the graduates of a job training program launched a day care center for the elderly “Happy Days” in December 2012. Now, 4 worker-members provide heartwarming care to 9 older people in the community. Recognizing the Center as a hub for care prevention and community development, the local government started exempting the Center from paying rent for the site (about US\$1,000/month) in April 2013.

While the Center has got on truck, our members never stop there. They launched a food-processing business “Minyo (meaning “beautiful woman” in Chinese characters)” in April 2013, where they develop their original products (e.g. Japanese buns) and sell them mainly at events and mobile stores. Currently, the members are taking lessons on Tofu-making every Wednesday to open a Tofu shop. For the future, they are also planning to start a farm café and a job assistance program for people with disabilities.

Power of GAGA: Now Up & Running (in Ishinomaki City, Miyagi Prefecture)

As reported in the February 2013 issue, Power of GAGA (GAGA = Mama) project started in September 2012. Since then, the members took training on how to create their own jobs and prepared to launch their own business. The membership has grown to 19 people. Finally, the members opened GAGA Tapestry (production and distribution of processed seafood) and GAGA-YA (meaning GAGA's shop: production and distribution of Tofu) on July 19th, 2013.



↑ Power of GAGA Logo



These 2 shops couldn't have made come true without local residents' support. For example, a former Tofu-shop owner with 40-year experience gave the members training on how to make Tofu. The members were also having difficulties in finding a place to open the shops because of the building shortage due to the "Reconstruction Bubble." Yet, thanks to the information given by local residents, the members were able to finally find the place.

As one of the initiatives to raise funds, Power of GAGA has started recruiting "GAGA Supporters." Each supporter will pay 10,000 yen (about US\$100), of which 4,000 yen will be used for GAGA's activities, and GAGA's Combo (a pack of GAGA's products that is worth about 3,000 yen) will be delivered to the supporter twice a year. Their next goal: to make these shops the community hub so that people of all generations can get together.

Youth Support Station: To Vitalize the Youth and Communities (in Ishinomaki City, Miyagi Prefecture)

JWCU members operate over a dozen Youth Support Stations across the nation, providing job assistance for NEETs and other young people to support their independence. The one in Ishinomaki City opened on May 20th, 2013, to revitalize not only the youth in the disaster-hit areas but also the whole communities.

The Station covers 4 communities which have been greatly damaged by the quake and tsunami and struggling to rebuild. The number of youths who receive public assistance in these communities is growing. The main industries had been seafood processing and welfare services before the disaster, but now a growing number of jobs are



short-term construction. The mismatch between the job demands and supplies has pushed many young people out of these communities. In the meantime, a number of young people also need emotional care due to the post-disaster stress.



Our members are currently working hard to raise awareness of the Station among the local residents and to build networks with various organizations and local governments, so that they can develop effective programs to support the independence of the youth and to revitalize the communities.

As one of our members says, “Reconstruction cannot be achieved in a disaster-hit community without the efforts by its residents themselves. We’d like to develop a new reconstruction model as a Youth Support Station which not only provides job assistance but also develops communities and creates jobs.”

Power of Okkah (=Mothers): Bringing the Community Together through Foods (in Watari Town, Miyagi Prefecture)

In Watari Town, the disaster in March 2011 flooded 47% of the Town, killed 305 people, and destroyed over 5,600 houses. To overcome such a devastating tragedy, our members started a job training program which was commissioned by the Town in November 2011.

The program started with 5 trainees/members, and they knew from the start that they would like to launch a food business. So, they visited several innovative food businesses to learn the know-how while collecting voices of residents such as “There is no place where we can eat home-made meals” and “There is no place for shopping” through community assessments. Our members had also learned that local farmers were suffering from a lack of successors, radiation problems and salt damage. Based on these lessons, our members decided to start a farmers market “Hamamichi (meaning “beach road” in Japanese),” where producers can play active



roles and where producers and consumers can communicate and relax. The members visited local farmers and producers, asking them to join this initiative, and nearly 40 of them have agreed to provide their products and formed a producers’ group.

Hamamichi, which opened in March 2013 with 9 worker-members, sells vegetables, processed foods (e.g. pickles, breads, baked goods) as well as handicrafts made by temporary housing residents. Local residents seem to appreciate this place because the products are

fresh and prices are reasonable. The members also put sofas and tables in the shop so that people can have tea, relax and communicate. In order to promote communication between producers and consumers, the members have producers to bring their products in the weekend, when the shop has the biggest crowd.

In addition to Hamamichi, the members also started farming in April and food processing in May. They are also planning to start an activity to support independence of people with disabilities.



Their journey of reconstruction has just begun.

Getting Ready to Start: We Are Almost There!

While some of our members in Tohoku have already launched businesses, others are in planning and preparation phases.

For example, in **Otsuchi Town (Iwate Prefecture)**, the trainees of vocational training programs formed several groups (e.g. welfare, food, energy), each preparing its own business activities. However, they are now discussing consolidation of their efforts in one direction. They have found a place to start a business, and currently they are preparing a business plan, focusing on developing a harmonious community (e.g. day care for children and the elderly, community restaurant, etc.).



In **Kesenuma City (Miyagi Prefecture)**, a job training program was provided in 2012. Its graduates have been preparing to start a home care agency, and they are currently working on paperwork. The local government has also invited us to provide after-school programs for the next year.

In **Minami-Sanriku Town (Miyagi Prefecture)**, a job training program started in December 2012. A training program to become care workers has just been completed, and the trainees are currently developing a business plan. They are also working with members in Tome City to develop their original food products. Their goal is to develop businesses to create a harmonious community, to utilize abandoned farmlands and local resources (e.g. tradition, culture, foods), to provide Ikigai (meaning “purposes of life, life worth living” in Japanese) to older people, and to create places for young people to play active roles.

Serving & Revitalizing the Disaster-Hit Communities

While the following examples are not the business activities per se, our members in Tohoku are also engaged in activities that can benefit and revitalize the disaster-hit communities.

Let Children Play (in Otsuchi Town, Iwate Prefecture)

Our members were commissioned by Otsuchi Town to provide job training programs in 2012. The members/trainees conducted community assessments during the training and learned that children in the disaster-hit areas were having difficulties finding places to play. For example, there is no big playground in a community, and a lot of children have to use a bus to go to school and therefore cannot join after-school activities as they used to before the disaster.



As part of the preparation to start activities to support children, the members launched a monthly program “Playground for Everyone,” in collaboration with local NPOs, to provide opportunities for children to play outside. The program started in May 2013, and the members organize a program at a different site each time. On July 20th, 2013, the members took 17 children to a park “Bell Gardia Kujirayama” to enjoy nature and outside activities. The ultimate goal of the members is to create a permanent place where children can play.

Cooperative Farm (in Rikuzen-Takada City, Iwate Prefecture)

In Rikuzen-Takada City, our members started a cooperative farm with a local farmer and community residents, so that they could work on a farm with residents of temporary housing and energize themselves. According to Mr. Yoshida, a local farmer and a farming instructor, “I hope the participants can find the joy in farming and cheer themselves up through farm work.”

Ten people from temporary housing have joined the program, and so far they met twice for planting and maintenance of the farmland. The participants seem to be enjoying this activity, saying, “It is really fun for people to get together and get physical activities outside” and “It is great to see what we planted grow.”



JWCU General Assembly in Disaster-Hit Area (June 14-15, 2013)

JWCU's 34th general assembly was held on June 14th and 15th, 2013, in Miyagi Prefecture with the theme of "Empowering Society through Cooperation: Generating New Vitality in Communities and Building Momentum toward Social Change by Citizens through Cooperation."

It was truly significant for us to hold our general assembly in Miyagi Prefecture, where the earthquake and tsunami hit so hard in March 2011 and where JWCU set up Tohoku Reconstruction Head Office 4 months later. The general assembly brought together about 600 members from nationwide. It was a great opportunity for our members to share 2-year



reconstruction efforts by Tohoku Reconstruction Head Office and practices through cooperation and solidarity by JWCU members nationwide.

We reaffirmed our determination to build the society where citizens themselves can create their own jobs and build their own communities in cooperation and solidarity with various stakeholders.

JWCU was deeply honored to receive many messages from our global friends. Again, JWCU would like to thank all the organizations and people that sent us kind messages for our general assembly.