



Fukushima HOPE News

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Hope does not disappoint us...

by Masaru Asaoka (*Director of the Fukushima HOPE Project*)



This fall marks Fukushima Hope Project's fifth year since it was founded in 2012 – just one year after the Great East Japan Earthquake. This ministry began out of nothing and was formed in direct response to the needs and prayers of the disaster. We praise God for His miraculous work in sustaining and leading this small ministry and we give thanks to those who have supported this ministry through their prayers and donations.

Although we underwent drastic changes this year, with a new set of staff and a major downsize to our work capacity, we are grateful for the generous donations made by churches, individuals, and organizations. Through these donations, we were able to host a retreat camp in the summer for children and families and develop new events through the “Hope Café.” We are grateful for our new staff Nozomu Takano (evangelist worker at Koriyama Fukuin Church), Joyce Takano, and Tomoko Kida (Koriyama Fukuin Church Church Member). Although the capacity of our work has decreased, the content of our work has been enriched.

It has been a little over six years since the Greater Tohoku Disaster, Fukushima continues to face lifelong impacts caused by the radiation contamination from the First Nuclear Plant. It seems as though the realities of this disaster are gradually fading as an incident of the past. Although citizens are returning and resettling into evacuated areas, it is not clear whether real solutions are being made for the people of Fukushima to recover. While the full impacts of radiation contamination on the health of the children in Fukushima are unclear, it seems that families have stopped talking about these issues. Children who experienced the radiation contamination from the Great East Japan Earthquake have grown up and are now in junior highschool, highschool, or in their early 20's; babies are now school-aged. The circumstances of these families have changed and with that, the issues they are facing have evolved.

Our project started with a small and simple desire to walk with those who in need. Although we don't know how well we have achieved this goal, we are fully aware that there are still many needs in Fukushima. Fukushima Hope Project is rooted upon the conviction that “hope does not disappoint” (Rom.5:5) and so we fervently pray that this becomes a lived reality to all we minister to.

Finally, I would like to ask for your continued supports. Although we have received some donations this year, there has been a sharp decline in our funds - many organizations ended their supports for us last year. As a result we are at present, using up our savings from the previous year. With many needs in front of us in order to continue this ministry, we urgently ask that you would consider supporting this ministry through your donations, prayers, and supports.

HOYOU CAMP

34th Hoyou Camp in Niigata

Date : August 1-3, 2017

Location : Gozu Renpou Syonen Shizenno Ie (Niigata)

Campers : Parents(3)、Kids(24)



The children thoroughly enjoyed themselves in the great outdoors of Niigata!

They engaged in river-side activities, games, crafts, camp fire, outdoor cooking, and Bible-hour. What was most memorable was watching the older repeat campers voluntarily taking care of the younger first-time campers. We were able to witness our campers mature! Throughout the camp there was a warm atmosphere of teamwork as the children helped one another.



Feedback from Campers

~ Reflections from the Children ~

“I enjoyed the games and river-trekking. Our team didn’t win but it was fun. and river-trekking was like an adventure.”

“I enjoyed talking with new people and running around a lot. The staff were kind.”

~ Reflections from the Parents ~

“Our family chose to stay together as a family instead of evacuating and living separately. However, I still have concerns around this. I’m so glad that my kids can play and enjoy themselves like this, even if it’s just once or twice a year.”

“We can’t go to these sorts of camps like we used to because there aren’t as many available. It’s great that you continue these camps.”



“Being in nature is a significant experience for children. I was reminded of this once again as I participated in the camp. It was an opportunity to experience God’s creation and I’m grateful for such camps where we can enjoy the outdoors without any worries.”

HOPE CAFÉ



In June, we began a new gathering and space for Fukushima mothers called the “Hope Café”. The Hope Café offers mothers with an opportunity to do a bit of self-care through art-making, hand-crafting, and socializing. “Self-care” begins with being aware of what one needs for their own total well-being. It involves intentional, proactive steps to support oneself with these needs. Hope Café seeks to offer mothers the space and time to have time away from their normal busy schedules and to experience self-care through art making. Throughout June and July’s Hope Cafes, we engaged in collage-making at four different local churches, along the themes of “joy” and “gratitude”. Whether familiar with art-making or not, all the participants seemed to have a rich experience. Children also enjoyed collage-making in a separate room.



We will be hosting three Hope Café gatherings throughout November and December along a Christmas theme. We hope that the Hope Café gatherings will be an encouraging time for those who attend.

Feedback from Hope Café Participants

“It’s been a long time since I focused on doing something other than housework and child-rearing. Through collage-making I was able to clarify and confirm a few things about myself.”

“It was a quality time – more than I had imagined. It’s hard to express yourself through words, or through drawing pictures but I was able to experience expression through collage-making.”

“I had a wonderful time. Making things and sharing with one other are very important and necessary things. I want to continue to participant in these gatherings.”

THYROID ULTRASOUND SCREENING

After the Great East Japan Earthquake 370,000 Fukushima children aged 18 years or younger at the time of the disaster were screened for thyroid cancer. At present, the screening survey is in its third survey screening process. Results thus far, represented in the chart below, reveal that 191 children have been diagnosed with malignancy or suspicious malignancy by fine needle aspiration cytology.

Thyroid Cancer Screening Survey Benign and Malignant Findings		
Preliminary Baseline Survey	Full Scale Survey (Second Survey)	Full Scale Survey 2 (Third Survey)
116 (Benign 1, Malignant 101)	71 (49 Malignant)	4 (2 Malignant)
# of Children who underwent surgery and were confirmed with papillary thyroid cancer: 152		

Unfortunately, participant rates for thyroid ultrasound screenings are decreasing. The participant rate was 81.7% (2011-2013) in the preliminary survey, 71.0% (2014-2015) in the second survey, and 35.8% (2016-2017) in the third survey. Although continued screening processes are necessary, these are generally carried out “assembly-line” style with results communicated to families through the mail, with inadequate explanation. In collaboration with UCCJ Tohoku District Nuclear Disaster Relief Task Force Izumi—we are in the process of looking at possibilities for providing sufficient thyroid screenings in Fukushima.

HOPE FUND REPORT

Through the Hope Fund, each year we support 30 families to retreat at their chosen destination, contributing \$200 to each family as a means to offset expenses for their retreat. Below are some of the comments we have received from families who have used the Hope Fund.

Feedback on the Hope Fund

“We were able to spend one week in the outdoors, playing in the ocean and river, playing in the dirt, learning about the insects and history of the island. We enjoyed countless experiences in nature.”

“We attended outdoors events introduced to us by the University students in our area. From starting a fire to cooking outdoors, planting potatoes and flowers, touching grasshoppers and frogs, picking leaves – it was a satisfying four days in Yamanashi.”

“We received supports two years ago and that was the last time our family was able to spend time away together. Our daughters have grown up and it’s hard to fit their schedules in with the Hope Camps, so we are very grateful for the Hope Fund. As a family we were able to retreat and spend a relaxing together in the hot springs. Thank-you very much.”

UPCOMING EVENTS

35th Hoyou Camp in Bandai (Fukushima)

Date: February 2-4th (Sunday-Monday), 2017

Location: Bandai Sei-Shonen Shizen no Ie

HOPE CAFÉ

Date: Nov 25 (Saturday)

Location: Sukagawa Megumi Kirisuto Kyokai

Date: Dec 2nd (Saturday)

Location: Fukushima Seisho Kyokai

Date: Dec 9th (Saturday)

Location: Koriyama Baptist Church