

Healing for Children in Fukushima

Final Report 2017

Meeting with Shinentai

Gadu met with Shinentai member Yuki-san and Fujii-san at Shinentai office on Monday November 20th, 2017. Gadu delivered 350,000 JPY which he raised for Shinentai in 2017. Gadu's husband Mike Schmitz also attended the meeting.

Shinentai is an NPO which has been working to protect the children in Fukushima since 2011, right after the Tohoku Earthquake. Shinentai's motto is "Just want to protect

children." Shinentai is focused on "Hoyou (保

養)", which is a process of taking children out of radiation contaminated area periodically, so their immune system can recover from the effect of radiation. Shinentai is also strongly focused on relocating families from Fukushima to the other areas of Japan in order to protect the children who are more vulnerable to the effect of radiation.



What is the current situation in Fukushima?

It has been almost 7 years since the Tohoku Earthquake which led to Tsunami and the destruction of Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant. As in US, the attention span of news cycle in Japan is fast and short. It is hard to keep people focused on the fact that the issue is still not resolved.

As Tokyo Olympic in 2020 approaches, both Japanese government and Fukushima local government are trying to erase the fact that there still are radiation contaminations in that area. The local government is trying to appeal that Fukushima is "safe," using mass media. They are encouraging people who have relocated to return to Fukushima.

But the nuclear core in Fukushima Daiichi is not contained and will not be contained for at least another 7 to 10 years.

When they “de-contaminated” the affected areas, they only removed the soil and put them on a huge plastic bag and left them in a pile in the same area. Some houses have those bags sitting in their back yard. When they removed the soil, there were weeds and grasses in the soil. After 7 years, those plants grew inside the bag and rip the bag to grow out of the bag.

The radiation level seems getting lower, but there is a huge fluctuation in the radiation levels, depending on where you measure. In some town, there is a public radiation meter, but the number on the meter can be significantly different from the actual radiation level.

What are the Shinentai’s activities?

Shinentai currently organize spring and summer Hoyou projects which they invite 1 to 3 families. During the one week Hoyou projects, the children get to play in the nature, eat mostly organic meals and enjoy fresh air. Children live in Fukushima cannot play with soil because of potential danger. Yuki-san showed me a photo of a young girl playing with sand in a park. She said it was the first time this child touched sand in her life.

While children are enjoying themselves, Shinentai staffs work with parents to discuss the possibility of relocation. They invite people who have relocated previously to talk about their experiences. (Please refer to “Shinentai Hoyou project Summer 2017” for the detail of the project.)

How have the Shinentai’s activities changed?

Shinentai is a small organization with part-time staffs. Their main method of reaching out is using internet. They have a website, Facebook page and blog (all in Japanese) to reach out and connect. They also attend seminars in Fukushima to introduce Hoyou to the families.

Currently, Hoyou seminar is only organized in Fukushima and attendance is declining. After 7 years, people who thought of relocating from Fukushima has moved already. So, most people who come to the seminar are people who have decided to stay in Fukushima for one reason or another and looking for a short term Hoyou get away. Those people also experience peer pressure from the others who have decided to stay. They are banded and pressuring each other not to “escape.” This is becoming more of an issue for Hoyou organizers, which need to be addressed very sensitively because those families can be very sensitive and defensive.

On the other hands, there are other developments. There are many people from Kanto regions who started to attend these seminars. Kanto regions are usually not mentioned as affected area of Tohoku Earthquake, but they are right next to Fukushima. They don't receive government support, so they are looking for opportunities for Hoyou.

What is the future directions for Shinentai?

As the public resources and interests declines, they feel the need to connect more with other organizations for resource and information sharing. Also, younger generations of people who have relocated from Fukushima started to organize to bring focus to radiation affected areas. They are the future mothers and fathers and they are concerned about their future children and their friends who are dying at young age from the effects of radiation. Shinentai is making connection with these organizations to see if they can do something together to protect future children.

Also Shinentai was invited by Lush Cosmetic store in a local mall to promote their cause during Christmas shopping season. They get to show photos of children from Hoyou projects and talk to the customers who come to shop and the company will donate to Shinentai from the sale of the day. They are very excited by this opportunity to tell others what is still going on in Fukushima. Also, they feel so encouraged that after 7 years of hard work, local people have noticed what they are doing in the community. They felt the importance of continuing the support even if it is a small effort.