

外大東北復興支援隊

TUFS for Tohoku



【About us】

'Team for Tohoku' was formed by four students of Tokyo University of Foreign Studies on 21 in April. They (born and brought up in Tohoku) were in the face of the earthquake and tsunami on 11 in March and had been seeking for the way of helping those who have been and still are suffering in Tohoku. Now it's unclear how long it will take to recover from the catastrophe, but clearly what is needed for the recovery is long-term support. We'll take an approach reflecting of the specificity of our university and we'll keep up-dating the information about our latest activities.

Now there are some 40 members in our group and have been participating in volunteer work mainly in Ishinomaki-City (which locates in Miyagi) with the help of other volunteer groups. Professor Funada (who is the guardian of our group) has also formed other group to help those who have infants are in need of support.

【From the representative of Team for Tohoku】

It has passed 7 months since unprecedented catastrophe occurred in Japan. The living situation in Tohoku gradually becomes better, although the extent of recovery and rehabilitation differs from place to place. We have still many problems and have to tackle them, so each of us is demanded to think about what we can do and how we act. 'Team for Tohoku' is also seeking for the real demand of people in Tohoku. (Kengo Yoshimura, junior of Portuguese major)



【Report on our activity】

1. Community Café: In cooperate with NPO JEN, we administer the community café where local people gather together to have a rest and exchange the information. At the time we opened this café, few people came here and we struggled to find how to run this place, yet we didn't stop advertisement and continued to distribute the leaflet. Owing to this effort, this café is gradually regarded as the community place and we welcome many people, especially primary school students. With these children, we play, cook and study together.
2. Rehabilitation of Miura Inn: Mr. Miura, the landlord of Miura Inn, is eager to reopen it in the nearest future, and as volunteer, we continuously help him. We assure you that it absolutely gets recovered, although some pillars only remained just after Tsunami hit.

【How do we continue the volunteer works?】

Since we founded this team we constantly visited Ishinomaki city in Miyagi prefecture every weekend (except for some national holidays). During summer vacation we stayed there continuously in the way that team members switched in turn. In total 35 members were involved in this rotation and spent time with local people.

April-July

Saturday

- 5:30 Departs from University
- 12:00 Arrival at Ishinomaki
- 13:00 Opening the café, volunteer at Miura Inn, Searching the needs of local people.
- 16:00 Closing the café. End of all activity.
- 19:00 Attendance at meeting with other volunteer groups
- 23:00 Going to bed

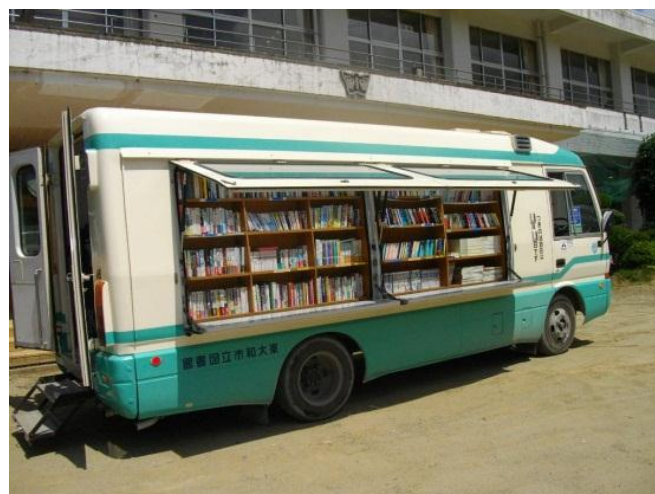
Sunday

- 7:00 Getting up
- 8:30 Opening the café, volunteer at Miura Inn.
- 17:00 Departs to university in Tokyo
- 23:00 Arrival, break up



August-September

- 7:00 Getting up
- 8:00 Open the café
 - ◇ Activity with children
 - ◇ Volunteer works for local people
- 17:00 Close the café, finish all activities
- 19:00 Attendance at meeting with other volunteer groups
- 23:00 Going to bed



'Team for Tohoku' was introduced to local people in the form of newspaper's article on 8th September 2011.

"Children's smiles increased, owing to the supports of 50 voluntary students from Tokyo University of foreign studies"



are much appreciated by their parents and families. 'Team for Tohoku' was formed by the announcement of Mr. Kengo Yoshimura, the current representative, who is from Iwaki city in Fukushima prefecture. At the moment 50 students including 30, who come from Tohoku region, belongs to this team. 3 to 6 students make a team every time and stay Ishinomaki for 4 or 5 days on average. They administer the community café and welcome local people, and during the summer vacation many primary school students visit there. Owing to their activity some students say it becomes easier to answer the questions of their homework, and parents also appreciate this change of attitude for studying. Mr. Yoshimura has so far visited Ishinomaki more than ten times and felt he could make a good relationship between local children and members of Team for Tohoku. He finally mentioned that any kind of support is still needed and he also devotes himself to the volunteer activities until the end of November.

[Review on the activity]

■ Community café

I have been to Ishinomaki city twice in August and September. During most of the time I spent at Community café. When I stayed there for the first time I couldn't figure out what I should do there and just much played with children, but for the second time I tough about the activities by myself and helped deliver "Yakisoba" (fried noodles with oyster sauce) to local people. Children, who always played with me, also helped my delivering, and neighborhoods appreciated their voluntary action. At that time I noticed that this community café was regarded as the place of creating local network, and was proud of being involved in the activity here.

My second visit was on 11th September and six months had passed since that catastrophe. All people including me stood in silence for a few moments, as a tribute to those who have passed away, and so did children. I decided to take actions as a member of Team for Tohoku for a long time.

(Minako Kamijo, sophomore of Hindi major)

It has passed almost 6 months since I firstly visited Community café. At that time it place was completely empty, but now that the number of people who visited this place gradually increased and we could always hear children's laugh. This is completely owing to much efforts and cooperation by some persons such as Ms. Kazuko, the landlord of this place, Mr. Okada, who has stayed here as voluntary staff, and Mr. Ito, who works for NPO JEN. I have met many people and made precious memories. I continue to do volunteer works from now as well.

(Yawara Suzuki, sophomore of French major)



■ Helping the repair of Miura Inn

It was in June that our group first accidentally met Mr. and Mrs. Miura. But since then, we have always been in touch. As a member of the group, I helped the repair several times, by taking out the mud from their inn, reinstalling walls and cleaning. I am not a professional of construction, but as Ms. and Mrs. Miura take care to explain what to do, it was not difficult to understand the process and to concentrate on the activity. Mr. and Mrs. Miura are a very sympathetic couple, so we enjoy talking with them during the break time. I am always surprised to hear that Mr. Miura volunteers from one place to another to help other afflicted people. It makes me think whether I would be able to do the same thing if I was in his place. Sometimes, when we were tired or when the weather was not suitable for the reconstruction, we just relaxed and talked to each other. But I felt that kind of time was also very important. The repair is progressing with the help of many volunteers, so each time I come back, the inn looks very different. It may be imprudent to say that I am looking forward to seeing the entirely rebuilt inn, but I believe the repair will be achieved one day, and that Mr. and Mrs. Miura can reopen their hotel. I would like to continue to help them toward that day.

(Risako Wada, sophomore of German major)

■ Helping the mobile library

I helped the management of the moving library in late August, for only one day. What I remember the most of that volunteering is that it was me who got the energy from people living there. The children, who had never seen me before, talked to me before I talk to them, and we had a lot of fun reading books and playing together. Many adults also thanked me for volunteering. I still remember the word of an old man, who said to me: "Do what you can. We'll also do what we can". This is a word that I keep reminding even today. It is weird that it was me who got cheered up by people there, as my purpose was to help them, and I feel immature for it. But it was a good opportunity to rethink about what I personally can do to in face of this disaster. I am grateful to Mr. Watanabe, who allowed me to volunteer in his moving library.

(Yuka Tokumaru, junior of French department)



【Participation to a workshop】

There was a workshop the 17th September, Saturday, from two to four in the afternoon at “Cafe Nakayashi”. The session was held by JEN (a registered non-profit organisation) for the adults living in the Nakayashiki district and around. TUFS for Tohoku also participated to this workshop which gathered 20 participants in total (including JEN and TUFS for Tohoku staff). After everyone introduced him/herself, participants discussed about their actual worries and troubles, and then reflected about what they can do personally or together, imagining the state of Ishinomaki city after five years. Concerning the actual worries and troubles, people raised the difficulty of buying everyday goods, the problem of housing and money, the hope for strengthened protection against natural disasters, and the fear that other people might leave Nakayashiki district for other places. As the discussion progressed, participants exchanged their opinions more and more actively. Finally, they reached the conclusion that they will hold a district level gathering to include other people of the community in the discussion. As observers, we felt that people were ready to cooperate with each other to rebuild their life to the level of before 03.11, even though there was a slight difference between people living in the district for only a few years and others living there for more than 40 years. In addition, we also observed that some people, who were actively involved in community activation as social workers before the disaster, had a quicker shift of mind; they could rapidly reorient themselves from the shock of tsunami to the “reconstruction” hope. We think that this kind of workshop, which allows neighboring people to gather together and to exchange their emotions and opinions, has a positive effect on them.



【From people of the Nakayashiki district】

“Cafe Nakayashi” is a gathering space which used to be the office corner of Nakajima industry Corporation. An officially recognized non-profit organization, JEN, borrowed the space in mid-July to distribute foods, and since then, there are a lot of volunteering groups involved in the management of the space. Three people who always support TUFS for Tohoku for the activities in Cafe Nakayashi gave their comments below.

More than five months have passed since I first met you members of TUFS for Tohoku. So many members kindly got involved in Cafe Nakayashi that I cannot even remember the total number...Each week, children look forward to coming to the Cafe in the week-end. During the summer vacation, you were really engaged with them, playing tag, hide-and-seek, soccer, etc. It was so hot during that season that I felt tired just watching you playing with them. Really, I appreciate all the help and efforts that you did.

Your kindness and smile gave cheer and energy to children, and I also feel myself that I can continue to make efforts and not to give up. I really thank you for that. If such a thing (= the disaster) never happened, I would never have met you. I think that the personal link that I got with you members is a precious one. The fact that I met you members is a treasure for me. I think your trouble to come here and to volunteer will still continue for some time; I appreciate and thank you in advance for all your help.

Kazuko

(Mrs. Kazuko, the wife of the director of Nakajima Industry Corporation, is one of our important supporters. From the time of the disaster until today, she cooperates with and supports many volunteers and neighbouring people. We would like to call her our “Ishinomaki mother”. It is always a pleasure for us to talk with her during our activity.)

I am volunteering here in Nakayashiki from April. From May, I have been involved in activities in Cafe Nakayashi together with the members of TUFS for Tohoku. I play with the children, I help them study, and I also talk with neighboring people over a cup of tea. The members of TUFS for Tohoku have shuffled each week, time has passed,...and I recently noticed that it is already October. The TUFS students who came here were diverse. Some were good in helping to study, others were good at playing, and still others in taking out the mud... Each person had his/her color, and even if it was the first time we met, we mixed together well and cooperated.

Of course, things did not go well from the beginning and I guess there were some periods when it was difficult for you guys, but you still kept on holding your activities. When I see Cafe Nakayashi today, I can see that it is the result of all the efforts that you have accumulated. Some children come every week-end, their parents listen to what they did in the cafe that day, other people come for events, volunteers supporting other districts also drop in to socialize...When you see all that, you feel that people recognize that Cafe Nakayashi is a good place, and that they want to come back. You also feel that the future is born there in the Cafe. You feel too that parents let their children come because they have confidence in the students of TUFS. This warm atmosphere and the laughing voices attract other people of the neighborhood...

I think you guys are doing what is needed from people. As winter is approaching and that it is becoming colder and colder, people will even more need places like here. I hope you will continue to come to Cafe Nakayashi and to Ishinomaki city and that you will continue to spread a lot of smiles.

Kazusi Okada, Permanent staff at Cafe Nakayashi, 18.10.2011.

(Kazusi is a volunteer who is staying in Nakayashiki district for a long period, continuing diverse activities ranging from manual labor to playing with children. He has given many ideas and made many efforts himself so that Cafe Nakayashi becomes a community-generating space. He is also a long-time cooperator of TUFS for Tohoku.)

“Standing close to local community”

Nice to meet you, my name is Taku Ito, worker at JEN’s Ishinomaki office. I mainly manage the support towards local communities where afflicted people live on the first floor of their damaged houses.

In the area covered by TUFS for Tohoku, more than the half of the residents has left for other areas and temporary houses. However, there are some people who did not leave for various reasons, and who continue to live in their houses at the same time as repairing the ground floor. In this category of areas, JEN has set up some “community spaces” (spaces where affected people living in their houses can gather, discuss and relax); it is in one of these community spaces that the members of TUFS for Tohoku are helping us, by organizing their activities such as playing with children and helping them to study.

There are not many children left in the area; cram schools and sport clubs were also devastated. So the community space activity itself is clearly for children. But at the same time, it also seems to have a positive effect on adults, who feel relieved themselves by seeing the children having fun. The children are also waiting to see TUFS students in the week-ends, and they can be as many as 30 in peak times.

It is in May that the community space activity has started, so it has already been six months. TUFS for Tohoku continues to organize an activity every week, and in addition, they were permanently present in the community space to engage with the children during the summer vacation. Their presence really helped JEN a lot. I think that it is the accumulation of these steady activities which gave TUFS for Tohoku the local recognition, both from children and adults.

There are now many volunteering groups present in affected areas, but TUFS for Tohoku is particular in that it has continually been present on the ground, and that it has built a good relation with the local community. When you also consider the fact that it is a students’ group, it is even more rare and admirable. The steady activities of the members of TUFS for Tohoku have built a diverse, rich relationship between the local community and the group. In Ishinomaki city, at last, all temporary shelters have recently been closed. However, people continue to have a precarious life. Thus I expect and encourage TUFS for Tohoku to continue their activities, standing even closer than now to local people; it is something that only they, who have successfully built a rich relation with the local community, can do.

(Mr.Ito, the permanent worker of JEN in Ishinomaki city, supports us in various ways in the activities of Cafe Nakayashi.)

Ruka Kato, a girl in the second year of primary school, has written a letter for us, asked by Mrs.Kazuko (the wife of the director of Nakajima Industry). Below is the original text.

“Summer vacation” (Ruka Kato)

After the disasters struck me, I had no friend to play with in the neighbourhood so I was playing alone and was sad. But one day, a person in the neighbourhood said to me, “Ruka, there are big sisters of Tokyo University of Foreign Studies who teach to study to children at Nakajima Industry”. So next day I went to Nakajima Industry with my homework. Inside, there were many children that I didn’t know, but when I said “Good morning” they noticed me. Big sisters and brothers taught me about the figures which were the most difficult in Dorazemi (note: Dorazemi is a kind of practice book for children), then I could answer the questions. After that I played with iPad and big sisters told me how to play with it. I could read manga on it, and I could play a game too. First, I was not sure how to play with it, but I could remember little by little. Then, we played Uno, Jenga and Life, and we had a lot of fun. Other than that, we also played ball games outside, we did rope skipping, we ate shaved ice too. For me, this year’s summer vacation was the most fun vacation that I ever had. I would like to study more and play more with big sisters.

(iPad was a donation from Japan Magazine Association. Manga and games were mainly donations from other organisations.)

【Notice】

We have continued our activity as reported above. However, in face of the accident which took place the 8th of October (Sat.) during our activity at Cafe Nakayashi, we are now handling the problem at the same time as organising our usual other activities. The new direction of the activities for children at Cafe Nakayashi will be decided in the end of November.

【Donation】

As we wrote above, we have the aim of devote ourselves to volunteer work in the long term. In fact, our team is only composed of university students. Now it's the truth that we have the difficulty in raising fund and we are in the face of the lack of funds to continue our activities. So it would be so pleasant if somebody could support our activities from the financial point. When you are in favor of our activities and willing to give us a hand, please send an e-mail to the address followed: *tufs.tohoku2011@gmail.com*

Thank you for reading this news letter to the end.

【How to join us】

How about joining us, Team for Tohoku? There is lots of things you can do as a member even if it's difficult for you to go to Tohoku. If you are willing to join us, please send an e-mail to the address followed: *tufs.tohoku2011@gmail.com* .

We are waiting for you!!

NEWS LETTER; Third Edition 04/11/2011

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