



Children

Large earthquakes occur every few decades in Sendai, so schools in the city had been closely working with the community since before this earthquake to carry out disaster prevention drills, which enabled the children to smoothly evacuate. Since the disaster, schools have been pursuing a higher level of disaster prevention education. In addition, as the living environment for children has changed dramatically since the earthquake, a range of support and other activities were needed.



The Mobile Playground that Tours Around the Affected Areas

Prior to the Great East Japan Earthquake, I worked in running the Adventure Playground at Kaigan Park, but the park was closed after sustaining damage in the tsunami. Feeling that the children needed a place to play freely to their heart's content, we visited about 20 affected areas with a colorful van loaded with a range of playground equipment. Through playing, the children heal their psychological trauma by themselves. Seeing the children roll mud, plane wood, roll around on the ground, and find new forms of play cheered up the adults, too.



Akio Nemoto
Adventure Playground
Sendai Miyagi Network

Outdoor playgrounds have the power to bring people together.



Children happily playing with water

Fostering the Ability to Think Independently and Make Decisions

Yuko Tsutsumi
Sendai City Education Center

We want to raise children who will act as upstanding citizens in the event of a disaster and are able to not only protect themselves, but aid in supporting others. After the disaster, we engaged in a series of talks with educators interested in the idea and created supplementary readers on disaster risk reduction. These readers are used at schools in the city to foster a deeper understanding in children on a range of issues, such as disaster risk reduction at home, the history of disasters in the region, what meals to eat in the event of a disaster, and more. It is important that the experiences and lessons of the disaster not be lost and are passed down to the next generations.



Fifth-year elementary school students learn how to interpret weather reports and risk forecasts



A supplementary reader containing details on subjects such as disaster preparation and disaster prevention map creation



Elementary school children visit the area devastated by the tsunami.



Active discussion and learning about disaster risk reduction



Playground equipment for children donated from Finland

SENDAI INFORMATION

Homeland Reconstruction Project

Children at schools around the city worked together to invigorate the community by volunteering, creating slogans and posters, and crafting original songs to promote the reconstruction. Since 2011, the Tanabata Festival, a signature of summer in Sendai and held every August, has exhibited origami cranes folded by more than 80,000 local children every year, conveying their hopes for reconstruction and the future.



A song of reconstruction sung at the Tanabata Festival venue



Culture

People sustained considerable trauma from this unprecedented disaster, and they were doing all they could to bounce back. Amid such chaos, we realized that we need something other than safety, food, lodgings, and money in order to make their daily lives feel normal again. It was music, art, sports, and other cultural activities in various ways, helped to soothe souls and give them strength. This hardship served as an opportunity to take stock of how important these elements of culture are in our daily lives.



Photo: Katsuichi Ohazama



The Book Wagon, a mobile library, making the rounds of the temporary housing (2011–2012)



A chorus formed of disaster-affected persons has been active since 2013



People in affected areas were impassioned by the activity of the local soccer team (2012)

SENDAI INFORMATION

Art and Reconstruction



Over 100,000 people visited the special exhibition



Workshops for children by the Prices

The Price Collection: The Joy and Beauty of Edo Painting was held in 2013 at the Sendai City Museum. The Prices, American art collectors, are known for their collection of Edo-period Japanese art. They wanted to bring courage and motivation to the Tohoku region through the beauty of Edo paintings. The Prices visited the venue numerous times and interacted with museum visitors during the exhibition period.

Supporting through Music



Miya Ito
Center for Recovery through
the Power of Music, Tohoku

Two weeks after the earthquake, daily life was at a standstill. Everyone was full of anxiety. It was precisely then that the Center started its musical activities. At the time, the performers had questioned themselves about whether it might be too soon to be engaging in music, but we went forward with the plan out of the conviction that we wanted to support disaster-affected people. When performances began in the midst of towns still being rebuilt, the music stirred the hearts of many, unlocking the emotions they had bottled up within them. The concerts held at evacuation centers and temporary housing, as well as at Disaster Reconstruction Municipal Housing, numbered over 700. We hope to continue delivering music that brings cheer and vitality to the affected areas.



Memorial concerts for the disaster were held on the 11th of each month during 2016

Beloved Baseball Keeping the Spirit Up

The Okada Elementary School youth baseball team lost all of its equipment when it was washed away in the tsunami. We are deeply grateful to the groups and companies nationwide who supported us by donating equipment which allowed us to practice once again. Being able to get absorbed in baseball to forget the hardship proved a major help to both children and adults alike. Children who entered elementary school the same year as the earthquake have today graduated and are now in junior high schools. Looking back on these six years, our community supported each other immensely.



Baseball is popular among children in Japan, with many elementary schools having their own teams



Takayuki Kawashita
Shigeki Mikami (pictured at left)
Megumi Mikami (pictured at right)
Okada Elementary School Club



Passing Down and Sharing Experiences

Sendai's plains area was hit by tsunami damage previously in 869 and 1611. Legends of tsunamis still remain at shrines in eastern Sendai, indicating that those who came before sought to share the history of disasters. Unfortunately, we were unable to fully make use of this knowledge in preparing for disasters in the present. To that end, we are engaging in a range of efforts to pass down our experiences and lessons learned, as well as to share information far and wide throughout Japan and the world to contribute to disaster prevention and risk reduction.



An exhibition on tsunami damage (tsunami remains courtesy of: MMIX Lab; video courtesy of: Hikaru Fujii)



Preservation of records about the disaster



Preservation and exhibition of disaster ruins



SENDAI INFORMATION

Legends of Tsunamis at Religious Facilities



Namiwake Shrine



Takoyakushi

Namiwake Shrine in the east of Sendai is where legend says that in a tsunami, a sea god riding a white horse parted the sea in two and stopped the tsunami. Takoyakushi in the south of Sendai is where legend says that in a flood, an octopus attached to Bhaiasajya-guru was washed ashore.

Valuable Materials Linking People and Conveying the Experience of the Earthquake



Hideki Sakamoto (pictured at right) Masami Sato (pictured at left) 20th Century Archive Sendai

Since 2009, we have been collecting old photographs and videos. Twelve days after the disaster, we drew on that experience to call on local residents on social media to contribute their own content and help us preserve the memory of the earthquake and tsunami at the grassroots level. The content we received included scattered debris and people eating by candlelight. This content was published online, through exhibitions, and in booklets. We also created a project that used footage we collected before the disaster to talk about memories. Seeing nostalgic footage, people opened up and spoke actively with each other. We would like to continue utilizing the strengths of the media we have collected to tie people together.



"Discussing the past society" —fostering spontaneous interaction

The Disaster Ruins: A Message for the Future



Participants of the G7 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors' Meeting, Sendai (2016) visited Sendai Arahama Elementary School

Sendai Arahama Elementary School stands about 700 meters away from the coastline. I was an elementary schooler at the time and was at school when the earthquake struck. The tsunami which came after the enormous earthquake reached the second floor of the school building, but we quickly rushed to the top floor and escaped. The school building was the only high and durable building in the Arahama area, which meant the local residents also evacuated there. Amid uncertainty and cold, we supported each other and 320 of us survived, among them children, teachers, and local residents. Our day-to-day training allowed for a smooth evacuation process. Today, the school ruins remain open as a means of preserving and exhibiting the damage of the earthquake. We truly want to convey our experiences and lessons we learned to the rest of the world in order to reduce the impact of disasters.



Koki Daigaku Graduate of Sendai Arahama Elementary School (in sixth-year of elementary school at the time)