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## Innovative Disaster Responses: Model Approaches from Japan's 3/11 Disaster



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### **Japan Center for International Exchange**

The Japan Center for International Exchange (JCIE) is an independent, nonprofit, and nonpartisan policy institute that works to encourage deeper international cooperation in responding to regional and global challenges. Operating with offices in Tokyo and New York, JCIE sponsors policy research and dialogue on cutting-edge issues in international relations, leadership exchanges, and initiatives to strengthen the contributions of civil society to domestic and international governance.

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## OVERVIEW

IN THE AFTERMATH of the tragedy of the Great East Japan Earthquake of March 2011, the world witnessed with admiration the resiliency of the Japanese people. Indeed, although full recovery may still be years or decades away in many regards, there is a great deal to be learned from the way in which the people of Tohoku responded to the disaster. In particular, Japanese civil society, which had not been a particularly strong force in Tohoku in the past, stepped up to play an active role in the recovery and reconstruction process. Not only did their efforts become an important supplement to the work of the national and local governments, but in many cases, these organizations have been impressive innovators, finding new and unique ways to address the various issues that have emerged in post-disaster communities.

This report introduces four innovative projects that have been carried out in Tohoku: the Mederu Car Grocery Delivery Project of Sankaku Planning Iwate; the Kamaishi Kitchen Car Food Trucks, organized by the Fuji Social Welfare Foundation and Kamaishi Platform; the Sanaburi Foundation, the first community foundation in Tohoku; and the Tohoku Outreach Mission organized by the Japan Medical Society of America, the September 11th Families' Association, Rotary clubs, and the Arnhold Global Health Institute at Mount Sinai Hospital. These programs are presented as cases that can be emulated in post-disaster scenarios in other countries around the world, and especially in developed countries.

### **3/11 and Civil Society Organizations**

The disaster that struck on March 11, 2011—a combination of earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear plant meltdown—was unprecedented in scale and in the damage it left along the coastline of Tohoku, the northeastern region of Japan. The tsunami, which was triggered by a magnitude 9.0 earthquake, washed away 420 miles of coastline, taking the lives of more than 18,000 people and destroying hundreds of thousands of buildings. The meltdown at the nuclear plant in Fukushima led to a mass evacuation, exacerbating the already devastating situation on the ground.

At one point, more than 470,000 people in total were displaced by the disaster, and four years after the event, nearly a quarter of a million people remain unable to return home.

Because of the scale of the destruction, it was clear from the beginning that as much help as possible would be needed for the recovery and reconstruction of Tohoku. Civil society organizations (CSOs) were there from the very beginning, working in the same areas as the military forces, providing medical care and delivering relief supplies. This included major organizations that are active on the international stage, such as the Japanese Red Cross Society, Peace Winds Japan, and the Association of Medical Doctors of Asia, as well as a large number of smaller nonprofit organizations that focus primarily on the local level in Japan.

As months and then years passed, the situation in Tohoku moved from emergency relief to recovery and reconstruction. CSOs have been deeply involved in each of these phases, responding to changing and diversifying needs on the ground. The three hardest-hit prefectures—Iwate, Miyagi, and Fukushima—today host approximately 2,000 nonprofit organizations, with new organizations being established after the disaster at a faster rate than the national average. Many organizations from outside of the region have also extended a helping hand to Tohoku. The Japan Civil Network for Disaster Relief in the East Japan (known as JCN), a network of groups supporting Tohoku’s recovery effort, had over 800 members registered at its peak, the majority of which were organizations from outside of the region.<sup>1</sup> In some ways, Tohoku, where the nonprofit sector was relatively underdeveloped in comparison to metropolitan areas, has become the country’s new hub for nonprofit activity since the disaster, supporting various aspects of people’s lives and the reconstruction of affected communities.

While Japan’s civil society is often considered less developed than that in Western countries and some other Asian countries, CSOs are now playing a crucial role in the post-disaster recovery and reconstruction in Tohoku. Indeed, there are a few characteristics unique to civil society groups that made them particularly viable and important players. First, because of

their size and nature, CSOs are often able to quickly mobilize and take action. They also tend to be more flexible than established systems and can swiftly respond to pressing needs on the ground, adapting to the changing environment. Second, they are good at finding and providing services in niche areas where there may be a gap. While public services tend to focus on the needs of the majority and set different priorities according to preexisting regulations and guidelines, civil society organizations may focus on specific populations or fields that they see as being underserved or with which they feel a strong association.

In Tohoku, those traits have helped to bring much-needed services to people who might otherwise have been left behind or have fallen through the cracks of public services. For example, civil society groups were able to build community centers for seniors in remote locations while the government prioritized bigger cities. Similarly, thanks to initiatives by nonprofit groups, schoolchildren were provided with places to study and play without worrying about disturbing their family or neighbors in the cramped quarters of the shelters and temporary housing units. There are countless examples like these.

## Why Are These Cases Worth Emulating?

In addition to their track record as swift responders and service providers, many CSOs working in Tohoku also have proven themselves to be innovators in tackling issues in the post-disaster communities, implementing creative projects. JCIE’s website has showcased a number of innovative projects undertaken in Tohoku that were carried out both by the private and public sectors,<sup>2</sup> some of which are included at the end of this report.

Building on that effort, this report presents an in-depth study of four model cases that provide ideas and lessons that can be emulated in disaster responses in other countries. The four programs tackle critical issues—providing care for seniors, reviving the economy and employment in local communities, providing funding for local nonprofits, and addressing post-traumatic mental health—with creative and

1. Japan NPO Center, “NPO Capacity Development Project: Project Evaluation Report (English Excerpts),” September 2014, Japan NPO Center, [http://www.jnpoc.ne.jp/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/NPOIkuseiEvalReport\\_All\(ENG\).pdf](http://www.jnpoc.ne.jp/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/NPOIkuseiEvalReport_All(ENG).pdf).

2. JCIE, “10 Innovative Ideas from the 3/11 Response,” <http://www.jcie.org/311recovery/innovative.html>.



effective projects. Their approaches are particularly innovative because they found a way to tackle those issues despite having limited resources and capacity, while still producing multiple impacts. The Mederu Car grocery delivery service, for example, not only provides a much-needed shopping service to seniors who do not have access to transportation, it also helps to monitor the health and wellbeing of the elderly clients by creating an opportunity for frequent interaction when delivering groceries. The Kamaishi Kitchen Car Project not only provides chefs who lost their restaurants with a means to earn a living again but also offers people in the community a place to gather and brings foot traffic and crowds to the recently reopened local business district. The Sanaburi Foundation has been playing an important role in facilitating giving in the region from outside donors, but it is also developing into a training and information hub for Tohoku's growing nonprofit sector. And while the Tohoku Outreach Mission of the September 11th Families' Association began with the strong desire of 9/11 victims' families and survivors to help ease the pain and grief of those who lost loved ones or were affected by the 3/11 disaster, it quickly became clear that the program brings healing to both the 3/11 and 9/11 families and survivors while creating strong bonds between the two groups.

Moreover, the projects discussed in this report demonstrate a degree of sophistication in addressing their respective issues. In other words, they did not simply ask victims what they wanted and provide what they were asked for. Instead, they put a great deal of consideration into how to address core issues in an effective way, sometimes indirectly, in order to make it fit the needs and culture of the local community. For example, the exchanges between the survivors of 9/11 and 3/11 induce survivors to deal with the psychological trauma by sharing their feelings, not by taking the direct approach of asking them to share their feelings, but by creating a situation in which they feel comfortable doing so. The Mederu Car grocery delivery project similarly tackles the issue of isolation among the elderly through what seems to be simple grocery deliveries on the surface, but actually has the clear aim of supporting the mental and physical wellbeing of the elderly clients. These approaches are particularly effective where people are hesitant to discuss psychological issues and need for counseling because of the stigma associated with it. As for the Kitchen Car project, the

most direct and immediate result of the operation was the provision of food—which is simple and has been done in other disasters—but the real value comes in how that service has been linked to local economic recovery plans. Finally, while the Sanaburi Foundation plays the immediate role of acting as a conduit for grants from outside the region to local organizations, its real goal is grounded in a long-term perspective as it seeks to provide the infrastructure needed to see the recovery through.

What has made these programs successful is that each one adapted as the situation on the ground evolved. This flexibility was possible in part because of their civil society nature. They were also particularly responsive to the changing situation on the ground because they were rooted in the local communities. For example, in the Mederu Car program, local women hired as staff to deliver the groceries played a key role in the success of the program. The Sanaburi Foundation was established under the auspices of the Sendai Miyagi NPO Center, which had already been deeply involved in the nonprofit sector in the region before the disaster. The 9/11 and 3/11 exchange was initiated by organizations in the United States, but they worked closely with local Rotary clubs in Tohoku to carry out the trips. Based on these characteristics, it seems that these four cases are ripe for emulation, and could serve as models for post-disaster recovery and reconstruction in other areas of the world.

In selecting the cases, we consulted with those involved in disaster responses in Japan and elsewhere and took their suggestions and recommendations into consideration. With the exception of the 9/11 families' mission, we also looked for cases that have received little attention in English publications, hoping to highlight local projects that may not have been widely reported outside of Japan.

## How to Read this Report

This study was developed based on information collected through both first- and second-hand sources, which included online materials and publications, interviews with individuals involved in the projects, and site visits where they were possible and appropriate.

Each chapter is broken down into five sections: introduction, how it started, how it works, impact, and

challenges. Following an introduction that provides the broader background and context, the section on “how it started” lays out the specific issues that each program sought to tackle and who was involved in launching the project. While there is no set formula to ensure that a project can successfully take off, the cases in this report show the importance of dedicated teams and individuals who are able to identify an issue at hand, drive the process of developing a solution, and bring various stakeholders together.

The section on “how it works” discusses the structure and operation of each program. Each initiative discussed in this report has been carried out with attention to detail, but at the same time, they have relatively simple structures that can be implemented on a rather limited scale and scope, making them good models for possible replication. On the one hand, they address issues that are commonly seen in post-disaster communities and have elements of some universal applicability, such as assisting vulnerable populations, creating jobs and reviving the local economy, rebuilding the community, facilitating philanthropy, and responding to the emotional needs of victims. On the other hand, the discussions on how they work show that each program operates in a way that fits its respective locality and environment.

The third section discusses the “impact” of the program, how it made a difference in people’s lives and in their communities after the disaster. Where appropriate, stories of actual beneficiaries are provided to give concrete examples of the impact that each program has produced to date. The keys to success are also discussed to further analyze the unique and innovative aspects of each respective program, examining how they managed to address a multitude of issues at once.

And finally, the section on “challenges” highlights some obstacles that those programs have faced and overcome, or challenges that they are currently facing four years after the disaster. Among the various challenges, one that is common to many programs in Tohoku is financial shortages. Four years after the disaster, the private philanthropic outpouring for Tohoku is waning, making it difficult for not only the organizations discussed in this report but for many others involved in Tohoku’s recovery and reconstruction to carry out sustainable projects. Shifts in the government’s budget and priorities have also affected their ability to continue their projects, even though they still see the need for their services. This issue of funding is indeed a problem that post-disaster response projects everywhere face, as disaster-triggered giving tends to dry up after a few years as people’s attention drifts away.

While financial challenges will likely remain, the organizations and individuals involved in the projects introduced in this report have already overcome many of the limitations that nonprofits commonly encounter to successfully implement projects that the government or other established entities could not. In the process, they developed innovative approaches that effectively address a multitude of issues in their respective post-disaster communities. It is our hope that the many CSOs that are working in Tohoku will be able to continue their initiatives despite those challenges, and that the social and political environment in the country will improve as people begin to recognize the important role that civil society groups continue to play in Tohoku’s recovery and reconstruction. It is also our hope that this report will serve as a source of information and inspiration for those who are working in post-disaster areas in Japan and in other countries.

# COMBATING SOCIAL ISOLATION AND PRESERVING DIGNITY

## ORGANIZATION

Sankaku Planning Iwate

## PROJECT

Mederu Car Grocery Delivery Project<sup>3</sup>

A grocery delivery service with a twist, the Mederu Car Delivery Project employs local workers to engage elderly disaster survivors at risk of withdrawing from society, and in the process, to monitor their physical and mental health.

In the aftermath of a disaster, one of the most challenging tasks for relief and recovery efforts is ensuring the health, safety, and wellbeing of vulnerable groups in the affected population, such as the economically disadvantaged or people with mental or physical disabilities. These groups often have special needs and face greater difficulty adjusting to the new and stressful environment in which they find themselves after a major disaster.

One vulnerable group that represented a substantial portion of those affected by the disaster in Tohoku was seniors. In addition to the fact that average age of the region's population is among the highest in the country, the elderly comprised a disproportionately large number of the victims because of their physical vulnerability. People over the age of 60 accounted for more than 65 percent of the deaths caused by the disaster,<sup>4</sup> and among those who survived the earthquake and tsunami, close to 90 percent of the approximately 3,000 cases of *kanrenshi* (deaths subsequent to but precipitated by the disaster) were people over 66 years old.<sup>5</sup> In addition to the general vulnerability posed by their physical condition, many senior citizens were suffering from physical and mental health problems that

3. For further information, please visit <http://www.sankaku-npo.jp/>.

4. Cabinet Office, Government of Japan, *Heisei-25-ban korei shakai hakusho* [2013 White paper on Japan's aging society], [http://www8.cao.go.jp/kourei/whitepaper/w-2013/zenbun/s1\\_2\\_6\\_07.html](http://www8.cao.go.jp/kourei/whitepaper/w-2013/zenbun/s1_2_6_07.html).

5. Cabinet Office, Government of Japan, *Heisei-26-ban korei shakai hakusho* [2014 White paper on Japan's aging society], [http://www8.cao.go.jp/kourei/whitepaper/w-2014/zenbun/pdf/1s2s\\_6\\_7.pdf](http://www8.cao.go.jp/kourei/whitepaper/w-2014/zenbun/pdf/1s2s_6_7.pdf).

required special care and medications, and the provision of both was disrupted by the disaster, thereby placing them at risk.

Senior citizens continue to face greater challenges in the reconstruction phase, as they tend to have greater difficulty in adjusting to a new environment and lifestyle. Having to move away from the communities they had called home for decades and to live in temporary housing in a new location has taken a toll on many seniors, and it has led to isolation and a deterioration in their health. Many live alone, and in the worst case, this can result in what is referred to as *kodokushi*, or “lonely death”—when people die alone in their homes and remain undiscovered for a period of time. Many seniors also have financial constraints, making it difficult for them to move out of temporary housing to quickly rebuild a new life in a permanent home.

In fact, the problems that elderly victims in Tohoku have been facing are not unique. An aid worker speaking about the elderly living in a refugee camp in Syria describes similar conditions facing elderly refugees from humanitarian crises, including poor health, the need for medications, difficulties in adapting to a new environment, and the great toll that isolation and the loss of community takes on seniors. He describes how elderly refugees tend to “suffer in silence,” confining themselves to their homes and often hesitating to voice their difficulties because they do not want to be a burden on their family or community.<sup>6</sup>

As seniors comprise a large portion of those affected by the 3/11 disaster, finding ways to assist them has been one of the major issues in the relief and recovery efforts. Numerous programs that target seniors have been launched, from special healthcare provision to social events, as well as home visits by healthcare workers and volunteers. These initiatives generally aim to check in on seniors living by themselves or give them opportunities to get out of their homes to interact with others, hoping to prevent isolation and a deterioration of their health due to inactivity.

One innovative example of this is the Mederu Car shopping service. The project has several goals. The immediate objective is the livelihood support given through the delivery of groceries and supplies to seniors living in temporary housing and other isolated locations. For a small fee of ¥100, the staff shop for basic necessities on behalf of senior citizens and

others with limited mobility in the temporary housing settlements. The broader and more essential objective, however, is not merely to purchase groceries for homebound disaster survivors, but rather to engage these people in conversation and to keep tabs on their physical and mental health. While this goal is similar to that of home visits by healthcare workers or volunteers, by making it a “paid” service, the Mederu Car project puts elderly clients at ease, making them feel that they are not relying on charity.

## How It Started

In the immediate aftermath of the 3/11 disaster, more than 470,000 people were displaced from their original communities, forced to move into temporary housing. Elderly residents in particular faced challenges adjusting to this new living arrangement. Temporary housing units could not be built in low-lying areas by the sea, so they were scattered throughout the region’s mountainous coastline, often in remote and inaccessible parts of town. Housing lots were built on loose gravel, making it difficult to get in and out for those in wheelchairs, using walking sticks, or with other disabilities. And in many cases, residents were randomly assigned to various clusters and units through the government’s administrative procedures, which ended up scattering them far from their original community. Seniors found that they had lost the fields where they used to work everyday; their longtime friends and neighbors were living in other temporary housing units or had moved away; the stores where they used to go shopping were no longer there; and now they had to live in cramped temporary housing units that did not feel like home and that restricted their movement inside because of the limited space.

The combination of these various conditions contributes to the tendency of evacuees, especially the elderly, to isolate and seclude themselves. They have lost their ability and will to communicate with others. In some cases, they have turned to substance abuse, most commonly alcoholism, as an escape. As their lives in temporary housing drags on, stretching the definition of “temporary” housing to the limits (it is now projected that it will take up to eight years for all temporary housing to close), these residents lack

6. Carlos Santamaria, “What It’s Like to Be an Elderly Syrian Refugee,” Devex, October 1, 2013, <https://www.devex.com/en/news/what-it-s-like-to-be-an-elderly-syrian-refugee/81961?mem=ua&src=news>.



clear prospects for the future, thereby exacerbating the already challenging conditions they face. Those with trouble adjusting tend to retreat from social life, and their physical and mental health go unaddressed, even when they suffer problems. As was feared from the start, many incidences of lonely death have been



Sankaku Planning staff purchase groceries for residents in temporary housing

reported at temporary housing units, as well as an increase in cases in which the psychological and/or physical status of elderly residents has deteriorated.

In response, Sankaku Planning Iwate launched the Mederu Car Delivery Care project in August 2011 to tackle three main goals. The first was to respond to the immediate needs of people who did not have adequate access to grocery stores as a result of being placed into temporary housing, losing their means of transportation, or losing the shops in their community. The second was to monitor the wellbeing of the elderly during the process of delivering groceries. And the third was to provide work for local women who were disaster victims themselves and had lost their source of income as a result of 3/11. This goal coincided with the original mission of Sankaku Planning, which was established as an organization to empower women and to promote gender equality. The organization is located in Morioka, a major city in Iwate, and it provided administrative support as the headquarters, while branch offices were set up initially in three cities in the prefecture with 10 staff members to run the service. The project then grew rapidly, covering five cities at its peak.

## How It Works

The basic function of the project is a grocery delivery service, through which food and other items are purchased and delivered for a nominal fee of ¥100 per delivery (less than US\$1) for those who are unable to easily shop for themselves. Sankaku Planning hired women for the project who are also disaster victims, some of whom also live in temporary housing. Some of the women came to the position thanks to their prior work experience in delivery services or door-to-door sales, so they were already very comfortable communicating with local residents and acutely attuned to the kinds of details that must be taken into



Staff keep careful records of purchases for their customers

account when approaching a stranger's front door for the first time. Such experience proved essential to the success of the project, since the main focus was not solely the grocery delivery but the communication that took place through regular interaction between the staff and their clients.

Each local team used flyers and word of mouth to extend their services to residents in the temporary housing units that have been built in clusters throughout each city. They also reached out to households that tended to be less visible—individuals and families who were assigned to live temporarily in old, vacated apartments, as well as those who were still living in their houses, having escaped direct damage, but were struggling with many disruptions in their lives as the result of the disaster.

At each locality, the staff worked as a team comprised of four or five members, including one “leader” who was the main coordinator and contact person with Sankaku Planning headquarters and the branch office. When somebody new called into the service for the

first time, all team members visited the person's home together to introduce themselves so that the new client would feel familiar and comfortable with who-ever might deliver their groceries in the future. After



Customers look forward to seeing the staff each time they receive a delivery

this initial introduction, the staff members worked in groups of at least two to respond to each service call that they received. This was to ensure the safety of the staff. It was also helpful in terms of keeping accurate track of the monetary transactions that staff needed to make with clients at each delivery.

Orders placed could be as simple as a favorite snack or a necessary dinner ingredient, or as hefty as toiletries or bulk cleaning supplies,<sup>7</sup> and shopping requests were tailored and individualized. An effort was made to deliver the exact brand, flavor, and size of the products requested by their clients. In some cases, clients asked them to shop at a specific store. While this might seem excessive, the goal was not so much to be efficient but rather to make the residents regain a sense of some normalcy and comfort in their everyday lives by getting items from a store with which they were familiar. Paying attention to the details of the client's request also helped staff gain trust and build a relationship with the client.

Delivery orders were itemized and receipts were written out to record each transaction after the groceries had been purchased. Then, the groceries were delivered to the client's home. The normal procedure included greeting the client, handing over the groceries at the door, and receiving the fee and cost of groceries before moving on to the next visit. But this interaction also often involved chatting with clients

for 10 or 15 minutes, or sometimes even longer. Such interactions with clients were not only helpful in ascertaining their health, but they were also crucial in helping some clients avoid falling into further isolation. This is particularly important in Japan, since the elderly there tend to be very reluctant to directly request counseling or support for any mental health issues due to the stigma. Some of the Mederu Car clients actually looked forward to those little chats so much that they would place orders just so that the staff would come and visit them. Staff members point out that it was not unusual for them to see their clients eagerly awaiting their arrival, anticipating the chance to chat about their day.

In cases where a client had limited physical capacity



Through casual conversations, staff can pick up on problems the person might be having and get them the appropriate assistance

or was ill, the staff would go inside the house and put away the groceries for the client. During that process, staff members maintained casual conversation and checked in with the client as they did during other visits to make sure that their clients were receiving the necessary care and did not need any additional services.

Each day's deliveries were logged item by item, and at the end of the day these lists were entered into a database to be sent over to headquarters. Each branch team worked in close consultation with headquarters when dealing with new clients or if any special situations arose to ensure that liabilities were avoided. Working closely with each local team, the headquarters was able to monitor the progress and impact of the project, while it also helped in responding quickly to support the local teams when any problems arose. Changes

7. While those who call in are predominantly elderly residents who are unable to drive or travel distances down mountainous roads, the program does not exclude other residents who also may need the service, such as mothers who have lost their cars and cannot transport the groceries they need.

in the frequency of orders or changes in what a client orders—whether a decrease in overall food purchases or an increase in orders for liquor—were monitored as a sign of a potential problem. In a number of instances, the staff members were the first to detect and respond to their clients’ problems. When the possibility of any illness or substance abuse was detected, the headquarters coordinated with local government agencies and social welfare groups to respond.

## Impact

As noted above, this project started with 10 staff members in three cities in Iwate Prefecture, but fueled by the region’s urgent need for the service, within a year and half it had quickly expanded to five cities in Iwate, including one of the hardest hit regions, Rikuzentakata. Simultaneously, the number of staff doubled to 20 women, all of whom were also affected by the disaster. At the peak of its activities, the Mederu Car staff were making approximately 570 home visits per month.

The ultimate goal of this project was to promote human interaction in order to support the improved mental health of elderly residents and the early detection of any potential problems. Individual accounts and stories indicate the successful impact of this project from that perspective. For example, a woman living in temporary housing in Miyako had started to develop health difficulties and became less mobile and energetic after living in the cramped conditions there. Mederu Car staff initially made a courtesy call and not a delivery, but by the end of the visit she had put in a simple order for a few household and grocery items such as soda and ice cream. She was withdrawn and very quiet, hesitant to open up about her health problems or to ask for the help and supplies that she needed during the first few visits, but she slowly started to open up to the staff. After a year or so of visits, the staff could see that she was returning to her old self—an extremely bright and upbeat person who was able to speak about how lucky she was that she had the support of her family as well as a steady pension income.

In this way, the project helped clients resume regular human interactions, allowing them to open up and talk to people again and to want to interact with others. It has helped to bring many people out of isolation, and when staff members have spoken with clients and their peers, they have been told that their clients seemed more lively and upbeat after a few months with the service.



Charging a small delivery fee on top of the cost of groceries makes people feel like customers rather than recipients of charity

By encouraging isolated individuals living in temporary housing to socialize, this project also helped to recreate a sense of community among residents of temporary housing units, most of whom were randomly assigned to a particular unit for administrative reasons and were not familiar with their new neighbors.

There were a few key aspects of the project that helped in achieving these impacts:

### Employing local staff

All staff members of the Mederu Car project were locally hired women who were also disaster victims and have been going through challenges similar to those that the seniors living in temporary housing are facing. This helped to overcome the challenge of cultivating relationships with seniors who might initially be skeptical and withdrawn. The fact that the staff shared similar experiences made it easier for the elderly clients to open up to the staff about their concerns and problems. It was also important that all of the women were from very local areas and thus were familiar with the local dialect and culture. This put many residents at ease from the beginning, and it set this project apart from other delivery services or home visit programs run by outside volunteers or professionals. Once the initial hesitation was overcome and personal relationships were established, the staff saw dramatic changes in their clients’ attitudes and dispositions. The staff sometimes paid visits to their regular clients without receiving a delivery call just for a chance to chat. And in return, the staff members at times even got calls from clients who did not have a delivery request that day, but were just checking in to make sure that these women were holding up as well.



### Monitoring groceries

A second important aspect of this project was that it was in fact a grocery delivery service. It is well known that home visits are a useful means to ensure the safety and health of elderly residents, especially those who live alone. Thus, from the immediate response phase through to the recovery and reconstruction phases, many home visitation programs have been launched in Tohoku that have healthcare workers and volunteers check on elderly victims. Folding the monitoring of the seniors' wellbeing into a grocery delivery service, however, has the benefit of minimizing the sense on the part of senior residents of "being checked on." Since there was a concrete purpose to the visit—to deliver groceries—it became part of the residents' normal daily life, especially if they considered themselves healthy and not needing support otherwise. In addition, because groceries are an integral part of one's everyday life and diet, monitoring the shifts in their orders allowed the Mederu Car staff to notice subtle changes in their clients' daily routine that may have gone undetected by other types of home visits.

### Charging a nominal fee

As noted above, for each delivery, the client paid a small fee of ¥100, or less than US\$1. This of course did not remotely cover the actual cost of the service. The project, including the personnel costs for all staff, was operated through donations and government subsidies to Sankaku Planning. However, the ¥100 service fee, along with the professionalism of the staff, proved to be a crucial aspect of this project because it made clients feel as if they were receiving a paid service rather than charity. It is sometimes difficult for the elderly, who have a strong sense of pride and try to be as independent as possible, to accept that they are dependent on the kindness of others. Thus, the fee system left them feeling more dignified and also prevented them from feeling guilty about making a call or chatting at length with their "shoppers" when the staff made a delivery. This also helped the clients regain a sense of responsibility and control over their own daily tasks and helped prevent them from falling prey to the sense of helplessness and dependency that they may have felt if they were living solely on donated supplies and government handouts.

### Challenges

The Mederu Car project had considerable success, and it became an indispensable part of everyday life for some clients who came to rely on their services to get their everyday necessities and companionship. However, as with many other programs launched after the disaster, the Mederu Car project has encountered a number of challenges. One is the burden on staff members. More clients began to openly consult the staff on their mental, social, or physical problems, but in some serious cases, this became a burden for the staff as they were not trained as professional counselors or social workers. To help them to a certain degree, Sankaku Planning organized a staff training session on counseling. Also, it was crucial that the headquarters worked closely with each branch office so that it could step in to connect clients with other services when such a need was detected.

The second challenge was financial. As the project focused on building strong relationships and engaging in interaction with the clients, it was by design a labor-intensive operation. The fee system, as discussed above, did not cover the costs, and thus the project relied heavily on donations and grants from both public and private sources. As a result of changes in the government budget, the project unfortunately came to an end in early 2015. While some of the clients continued to depend on the Mederu Car service even four years after the disaster as they still lacked any means of getting groceries themselves and enjoyed having the company, the fundraising conditions have become more and more difficult as the years pass, forcing the organization to terminate the project.

In addition to supporting the seniors in the disaster zone, this project was also launched with the hope of supporting and empowering the female staff members as they struggled to rebuild their own lives after the 3/11 disaster. To encourage their recovery, the Sankaku Planning headquarters held regular meetings for staff, where they could share their experiences and voice their hopes and dreams for the future. The organization attempted to encourage and nurture any goals—especially any business or entrepreneurial aspirations—that these women may have harbored but had not acted upon for fear that they sound far-fetched or unrealistic. Four years after the disaster, the Mederu Car project was closed down, but it is hoped that the legacy of this work will be carried on to some degree by the staff members.



## REVIVING THE LOCAL ECONOMY AND COMMUNITY

### ORGANIZATION

Fuji Social Welfare Foundation, Kamaishi Platform

### PROJECT

“Kitchen Car” Food Trucks<sup>8</sup>

The Kamaishi Kitchen Car Project rents out food trucks to local chefs affected by the disaster and helps them get back on their feet while providing fresh, low-cost food to local residents and helping to revitalize the local economy by drawing foot traffic to reopened businesses.

The 3/11 catastrophe in Japan claimed thousands of lives and destroyed critical infrastructure throughout the Tohoku region. In the port city of Kamaishi—one of the hardest-hit areas—a massive tsunami inundated and destroyed much of the business district, dealing a major blow to the city’s already faltering economy.

Recognizing the crucial role that job creation and livelihood restoration plays in post-disaster economic revitalization, the Kamaishi Kitchen Car Project was launched to provide food trucks at subsidized rates to local chefs in Kamaishi who had lost their restaurants. In addition to creating a path to employment, the food trucks offer the key advantage of mobility, allowing them to reach survivors in evacuation centers and, later on, attracting customers to emerging businesses in isolated areas.

This project is notable for several reasons. First, its relatively simple structure can serve as a model for other post-disaster regions where the infrastructure has been badly damaged or destroyed. Another advantage is that it can be started on a small scale—essentially from one food truck—then expanded as it becomes successful. Also, by focusing on the food industry, the project has multiple impacts: it provides immediate employment to local chefs and their staff, revitalizes the local economy by bringing crowds to targeted business districts, and builds a sense of community and normalcy in people’s lives.

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8. For further information on this project, please visit <http://k2cp.jp/>.



The Kitchen Car program began just three months after the disaster, when few restaurants remained standing in Kamaishi

While its simplicity is the key to its success, the program is also designed to have a rigorous chef selection process as well as monitoring and administrative support, which help to maximize the impact. The chefs have a better chance of “graduating” to their own business, while the administrative team can control how the food trucks serve the local community, which events they attend, and when. They are also able to dispatch all the food trucks to select spots where increased foot traffic will best benefit local businesses. Thus, the project offers a solid framework upon which other disaster relief organizations can build their own food truck initiatives.

## How It Started

Even before the disaster, Kamaishi’s economy suffered from an aging population and a steady exodus of young people from the region. The disaster prompted even more young families to relocate outside of the region, further amplifying the labor shortage. Working to promote the local economy in Kamaishi since 2009, the Fuji Social Welfare Foundation was particularly knowledgeable about the labor challenges facing the region. Following 3/11, the foundation conducted a survey, which revealed that restoring local food businesses would be one key to revitalizing the economy. As a result, the foundation solicited the expertise of an experienced food truck group to learn how to run a food truck business. They went on to launch the project in June 2011 on a provisional basis with three secondhand food trucks purchased with funds from donors both in Japan and abroad.

During the trial period, the food truck operators served lunch near evacuation centers and offered dinner in the heavily damaged business district. By August, a project review committee in charge of program administration and a chef selection committee were established. After selecting six chefs—five of whom were directly affected by the disaster and one chef who wanted to contribute to relief efforts—the project officially began on August 11, 2011.

From 2012, Kamaishi Platform, an organization that Fuji Social Welfare Foundation helped establish in late 2011 to assist with Kamaishi’s recovery, gradually took over the administration and general management.

## How It Works

The selection process is rigorous, requiring prospective chefs to submit an application and be interviewed. During the interview, chefs present their proposed menus and business plans, and in the final stage, the five-member selection committee evaluates candidates according to the following criteria:

- Previous business experience
- Extent of damage sustained in the disaster
- Profitability of proposed menu
- Sales ability
- Projected earnings and expenditures
- Each category is worth up to 10 points, for a maximum total of 50 points.

Successful candidates are offered a yearlong contract and asked to pay ¥25,000 per month (roughly US\$250) plus 5 percent of their proceeds in order to rent the food trucks. This fee covers organizational expenses and maintenance costs for the food trucks. Chefs pay an additional ¥10,000 monthly in insurance fees to Kamaishi Platform, which is returned to them at the end of the contract unless the chefs incur any damages to the truck. Kamaishi Platform, meanwhile, is responsible for paying the automobile tax, vehicle weight tax, automobile inspection fees, and maintenance fees. Thus, the total fees remain substantially lower than those of other food trucks that have tried to set up business in the area. The lower cost contributes to the speed at which Kitchen Car Project chefs are able to save money and rebuild their restaurants.



Restaurant owners are able to earn money as they work to reopen their restaurants

Kamaishi Platform holds mandatory meetings twice a month for the chefs to exchange ideas and insights. They also decide where and when chefs can operate the food trucks. When chefs receive requests to participate at an event, Kamaishi Platform confirms the layout, place, time, expected number of attendees, and accessibility to electricity and water, then consults with the chefs to determine if their participation is feasible. They also have considerable influence in the development of the chefs' menus. Beyond deciding the initial respective menu and prices in consultation with the chefs, Kamaishi Platform requires that chefs inform them of any later changes to the menu and prices. Furthermore, it is mandatory that no two menus are the same in order to avoid creating competition among the food trucks. In the event that multiple chefs want to sell the same food items, priority is given to the chef who entered the program first.

Demand for the food trucks is especially high in the summer, as people swarm outdoors to participate in community festivals and sporting events, so the food trucks have been mobilized to attend at least one community event per week during the summer. Moreover,

the daily location of each food truck is announced on the project's website and on Twitter, so customers are able to track their favorite trucks.

In June 2013, the project launched an open-air plaza in the downtown area where stores and small businesses had started to open. The new plaza functions as a site for community events where residents can watch sporting events and other broadcast programs. It features docks where the food trucks can park, a small stage for performances, and a raised patio where special events are held. The plaza has helped bring people to the downtown area.

## Impact

The program has been able to achieve a number of results. First, it has had a direct impact on the chefs who rented the food trucks. Since the start of the project, six chefs have "graduated" from the project and five have reopened their own restaurants. Their previous food trucks have been rented out to new chefs who will pass their trucks on to the next generation once they graduate.

The progression of one of the chefs is illustrative of the project's "life-cycle." He began by renting out the smallest kitchen car, a tiny yellow hatchback. He then switched to the biggest vehicle in the fleet, a large red truck, once its original renter left to reopen his former restaurant. After a few months, he too had managed to save enough to reopen his own *yakitori* (chicken skewers) shop. Finally, his old truck was subsequently rented to a new chef.

Mr. Miura is another example of a chef who has moved on from the program. He had just relocated his successful restaurant to a new, larger space in the Omachi area of Kamaishi and had nearly doubled his clientele when the disaster struck. The restaurant was destroyed and the supply of sake that he had carefully selected from around the country was swept away by the tsunami. Viewing the food truck project as a positive step toward rebuilding and reopening his restaurant, Kanpai, Mr. Miura started operating a kitchen car under the same name. The popularity of his juicy sirloin steak over rice became particularly popular and allowed him to build a loyal clientele once again.

While not all of the chefs follow this path, one advantage that the Kitchen Car Project chefs gain is





The trucks have provided a popular gathering place for residents, particularly in the summer

that they are well supported by Kamaishi Platform throughout the course of the project. Through consultations and monitoring, the chefs have a greater chance of succeeding and reopening their own businesses as participants of the project. They also receive additional help in cultivating local communities and a new clientele, as the program coordinates their participation in local events and helps them gain more exposure through social media and other outlets.

More recently, the project has expanded its participation base to people who are not local chefs directly affected by the disaster but who have entrepreneurial aspirations. One such participant is Ms. Kojima, who wanted to make a fresh start after the earthquake and decided to start her own business. Having enjoyed crêpes in other towns, she always wondered why there were no crêpe shops in Kamaishi and had long wanted to start a crêpe stand of her own. After she heard about the project, she applied and launched the Yotsubaya (Four-Leaf Clover Shop) kitchen car, realizing her dream. The shop is particularly popular with young students, offering a much-needed place to meet given that many of their other gathering spots were destroyed in the disaster.

In fact, this aspect of the operation has grown, as the entrepreneurial draw of the project managed to bring people into the region from other parts of Japan. As of September 2013, two and a half years after the disaster, 10 out of the 12 food trucks then open for business were being operated by restaurant owners from outside of Kamaishi. This sends a hopeful message to the region, which faces an aging population and a long-standing effluence of working-age professionals to places with better economic prospects, such as Tokyo. The fact that

the project, by offering an opportunity for people to operate food trucks, successfully attracted able-bodied workers interested in supporting Tohoku, demonstrates the economic potential of the region and indicates the presence of people with aspirations and a willingness to relocate to Tohoku to make a difference. This also shows the versatility of a food truck project that can adapt to changing needs and situations as recovery and reconstruction progresses in the region.

Second, the project has had an important impact on the broader local economy by attracting people to new and old businesses that were suffering from a loss or lack of customer base after the disaster. The combination of the food trucks and special events held in the plaza has served to create a joyful, festival-like atmosphere that lures people to the site and to the emerging businesses in the surrounding area. The influx of people to the area has given nearby businesses the opportunity to gain more customers and build a loyal customer base that will continue to return even without the presence of the food trucks.

From this perspective, investing in the building of the food truck plaza paid off. The popularity of the food trucks soared after the construction of the plaza, and to date, the Kitchen Car Project trucks have been invited to participate in more than 50 events and the project has sponsored over 15 of its own events. At a public viewing of a soccer match during the 2014 World Cup, for example, the food trucks served food and drinks to over 400 participants—a substantial turnout in a small town with fewer than 40,000 residents. These types of events have contributed to reviving the local economy as well as rebuilding the local community.

Third, it should be noted that the contributions of the project extend beyond the economic realm, as the program—especially during the early stages of the recovery—helped people staying in evacuation centers and temporary housing to deal with their life as evacuees. The access to warm “normal” meals that were not emergency relief supplies, and the ability to make choices and purchase food, helped disaster victims regain a sense of normalcy in a small but important way. The food trucks also brought life back to evacuation centers and empty lots, giving people a reason to gather and have a little time to enjoy themselves and each other’s company while their lives were full of uncertainty and worries.

## Challenges

Despite the overall success, the project has encountered several challenges since it began. One challenge was related to the fact that the food truck business is, by nature, greatly affected by weather—including Tohoku’s cold winters and the early summer rainy season. While trucks tended to be busy during the summer, the question was how to keep up the business during the winters or at other times when the weather was bad. The answer was found by investing in attachable portable canopies and vinyl walls that would keep in the heat and keep out the rain and snow, thereby allowing the food trucks to operate late into the night, during inclement weather, and also during Kamaishi’s harsh winters.<sup>9</sup>

Second, the cost of procuring food trucks became a major challenge, albeit an unexpected one, after the program began. This derived from external factors, as food trucks suddenly became a popular trend nationwide, meaning that the supply of vehicles around the country has disappeared and the price has skyrocketed. This made it difficult for the project to expand further when there was a demand. Additionally, while Kamaishi officials expedited the process for getting the necessary vending permits needed to operate the trucks, it was not nearly so easy in areas outside of Kamaishi.

In addition, as food trucks became popular around the country, the Kitchen Car Project trucks found themselves competing with food vendors that in many cases were offering cheap, sub-standard food. The project organizers had to come up with a strategy for coordination and communication in order to ensure that their chefs’ reputations and businesses were not affected. To do so, they use their website and social media (especially Twitter) to let customers know where their favorite trucks will be and at what time.

Despite the challenges, the Kitchen Car Project offers a useful model for other post-disaster communities, and its work has received a number of accolades.<sup>10</sup>

Most importantly, the project organizers have been working with other NPOs in an advisory capacity to implement similar projects in other cities. In the future, the project organizers hope to bring together food truck owners from around the world for a “World Food Truck Festival” in Kamaishi, where food truck operators will be able to exchange ideas on innovative ways to contribute to their communities, specifically during post-disaster recovery efforts.

The needs and conditions on the ground are changing rapidly. While the Tohoku region is in transition, trying to find its way to recovery and reconstruction, the Kitchen Car Project is also in transition, adapting to the new environment in order to best respond to the current needs in Kamaishi. It has provided employment for more than 30 people to date, but thanks to its provision of service to evacuees following the disaster, its help in encouraging people to come out to shop and attend community events during the recovery phase, and its assistance in creating graduates who have successfully reopened restaurants as part of the reconstruction phase, the project has clearly had a much broader impact on the economy and the community of Kamaishi.



An open-air plaza was opened in downtown Kamaishi, where food trucks can “dock”

9. A truck with room inside for seating was also donated in 2012.

10. In 2014, Kyodo News and local newspapers honored the Kitchen Car Project with the 4th Regional Revitalization Award. Also, the open-air plaza won the prestigious Japan’s Good Design Award administered by the Japan Institute of Design Promotion.

## BRIDGING NATIONAL RESPONSES AND LOCAL NEEDS

### ORGANIZATION

Sanaburi Foundation

### PROJECT

Launching a Community Foundation<sup>11</sup>

Prior to 3/11, there were no philanthropic foundations focused on the Tohoku region, and the nonprofit sector there was underdeveloped. Following the disaster, Sanaburi Foundation was created to serve as Tohoku's first community foundation, engaging in grantmaking and capacity building for local nonprofit organizations to strengthen the region's civil society sector.

As has been the case with major disasters elsewhere, the 3/11 earthquake and tsunami triggered a massive charitable response, as donations for relief and recovery efforts poured into the Tohoku region from across Japan and around the globe. In fact, organizations and individuals outside of Japan donated over \$1 billion, with more than \$737 million being given by Americans alone.

Amidst the immediate and overwhelming global response, one of the major challenges for donors outside of the region was to identify viable, meaningful projects to fund that were being run by organizations on the ground. While a large portion of the donations went to major international humanitarian organizations such as the Red Cross and Save the Children, there were also many donors who hoped to send money to smaller local groups that were deemed to be important actors, especially in the long-term recovery of the region. However, because Japanese civil society was not accustomed to receiving grants from overseas, and given that the region's nonprofit sector was particularly underdeveloped even by Japan's standards, it was difficult for outside donors to assess local needs and to navigate the social structures, the relationships among various stakeholders, and the local culture of the region. Thus, the role of intermediary organizations

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11. For further information on the foundation, please visit <http://www.sanaburifund.org/>.

became crucial in bridging the charitable response from the outside and the needs of local community groups.

This situation was not unique to Tohoku; similar instances can be found in other regions and countries whereby foundations played an intermediary role after a disaster. For example, after Hurricane Katrina in 2005, the Greater New Orleans Foundation (GNOF) experienced an outpouring of donations from around the world. In response, the foundation established the Community Revitalization Fund in partnership with local, national, and community foundations to channel a total of \$23 million over five years to over 50 organizations. With expertise in the region's civil society sector and networks with local and national philanthropists, GNOF was uniquely positioned to coordinate the disaster response and invest in projects that addressed the needs in New Orleans at the time.

Similarly, the Sanaburi Foundation played an intermediary role after the Tohoku disaster by facilitating donations coming from Japan and overseas to local projects that were playing a critical role in the recovery process. Their expertise in the region's civil society sector has helped them identify 680 community projects to support through a rigorous selection process. As of January 2015, they had received over \$12 million in grants for these projects, mostly from donors who had preexisting connections to the foundation and were looking for ways to send money to Tohoku. The foundation's networks outside and within Tohoku allowed them to coordinate the response and make sure that the outpouring of support from around the world was appropriately used to meet the needs on the ground.

## How It Started

Many donors responding to the March 2011 disaster recognized the importance of local groups that were working on the ground. These smaller organizations had a greater knowledge of the affected communities and were able to respond effectively to the various needs of the people in the region, and so many donors hoped to send money to them. However, Japan, and in particular Tohoku, posed some challenges as outside donors tried to find potential grantees.

The first hurdle for donors was the relatively underdeveloped state of Japan's civil society sector. As

of today, there are about 50,000 NPOs in Japan and approximately 2,000 of them are located in Iwate, Miyagi, and Fukushima Prefectures, but a significant number of these organizations in Tohoku were created after 3/11. Most Japanese nonprofits operate with limited financial resources and a small number of staff and they lack the capacity to focus on fundraising and other outreach activities to attract potential donors. Moreover, it was difficult for Japanese nonprofits to reach out to overseas donors given that most of their staff members are not able to communicate in English. Japanese NPOs also do not place much priority on branding and PR, which makes it difficult for donors to identify potential grantees in the first place.



Sanaburi Foundation staff meet to discuss their programs

And if the donors did succeed in identifying a potential grantee, they were then faced with a second hurdle, which was the need to have a good understanding of the local society and culture in order to maintain a healthy partnership with the grantee. Donors needed to be sensitive to the dynamics of Japan's civil society and the degree to which Japanese organizations have to navigate the complex relationships among local stakeholders, which often makes any initiative move more slowly than expected. With the Japanese NPOs' limited experience in writing grants, it was also difficult for a donor to assess the impact and the sustainability of the organizations, and they did not always meet the accountability and transparency standards that many donors require from their grantees.

In addition to the lack of information available to potential donors about Japanese NPOs, another issue was the fact that Tohoku's widespread destruction clearly called for a long-term approach to recovery. Even at the height of the early relief efforts, there were certain individuals who recognized that government



action and one-time donations to the region would not be sufficient to pave the path toward rebuilding the lives, communities, and businesses that had been destroyed by the disaster. Once such person was Sanaburi's founder and chairperson, Prof. Seiichi Ohtaki of Tohoku University, who believed that Tohoku needed a funding channel that could continue to support the region's recovery activities 5 to 10 years down the road.

In order to respond to such needs, the Sanaburi Foundation was established three months after the disaster to serve as the first community foundation in the Tohoku region. It was set up under the auspices of the Sendai Miyagi NPO Center, which had been supporting the local nonprofit sector and had experience with grantmaking in the region since 2001. Thus, the foundation was able to rely on the local knowledge and experience of the Sendai Miyagi NPO Center from the very beginning.

## How It Works

The main function of the foundation is to channel funds to local nonprofits, and so far it has helped provide ¥1,583,150,000 (approximately US\$12.5 million) in grants to 680 community projects (as of January 2015). A large portion of the funding came from five major donors outside of Tohoku, including the Japan Society of the United Kingdom, Suntory Holdings, and Save the Children Japan. In addition, the foundation operates a large-scale initiative on behalf of the Small and Medium Enterprise Agency.

The foundation offers donor-advised funds, which keep the community's needs in mind while allowing the donors to maintain a degree of control over how and when their money is used. These characteristics of the foundation made it an attractive partner for donors responding to the disaster.

The foundation's partnerships with Japan Society and Save the Children were born out of preexisting connections between the foundation's parent organization, the Sendai Miyagi NPO Center, and donors such as Save the Children and the UK's Japan Society, which gave the foundation the advantage of receiving large outside funding at the beginning of its operations. In addition, the foundation's expertise in the region's civil society sector and its ability to assess the changing needs of the

communities were important factors in the development of these partnerships.

To date, the foundation has received over 1,300 grant applications from Tohoku's grassroots organizations, including applications received for grants managed by the Small and Medium Enterprise Agency. During the selection process, the Sanaburi Foundation staff members organize an outreach campaign to solicit applications. Once the applications are received, they conduct the initial screenings to narrow down the candidates. In the third stage, the staff members make site visits to prospective grantees for two-hour interview sessions before the selection committee reaches its decision on the final grantees. The fact that the foundation is locally situated enables them to carry out this thorough process on an ongoing basis. Fewer than half of the applicants are selected to receive grants, and the careful screening process allows the foundation to make informed decisions on the projects that will be sustainable and effective in the long term. It has also contributed to building the foundation's expertise and in-depth knowledge about local groups within the short period of time since its establishment.

One of the major funds managed by the Sanaburi Foundation is the Fukushima Susumu Fund, which offers one-year grants to NPOs involved in helping Fukushima children ages 0–18 years old who have been affected by the nuclear disaster. A major concern for parents living in Fukushima is letting children play outside, which may expose them to harmful levels of radiation. As a result, recent research showed that children from Fukushima are the most obese in Japan because of their inactive lifestyle. The Fukushima Susumu Fund supports initiatives that offer an indoor space for children to play and exercise, as well as other programs that provide innovative solutions to the problems faced by the children of Fukushima.

The Sanaburi Foundation also received a grant from Save the Children Japan to establish the Kodomo Hagukumi Fund, which supports NPOs that are working to help children affected by the disaster. One group that has received funding manages a hotline for children in Fukushima who are looking for someone to talk to about their problems at home or in school. In the first month, the group received over 5,000 phone calls. As an increasing number of people feel the mounting stress and uncertainty affecting their lives, the mental health component has become crucial in the recovery process.



Also, while the foundation does not limit its focus areas in terms of target demographics or region within Tohoku, it is careful to support projects that address the changing needs of the communities. For example, during the first year after the disaster, because so many children found themselves confined in the cramped quarters of temporary housing, grants were awarded through the Kodomo Hagukumi Fund to groups creating spaces where children could play. By the third year, the foundation was more focused on identifying groups that were providing mental health care for children and strengthening support groups for parents.



A mother receives a hand massage and a chance to talk at a "Mama Salon" organized by Kosodate Ship with Sanaburi funding

The Sanaburi Foundation is also working with the Small and Medium Enterprise Agency of Japan to manage weekly workshops designed to train entrepreneurs who are essential for reviving the economy of the region. Aside from the general course, a targeted course for women was also offered to help them start up businesses in the city, and it included lessons on basic marketing, lectures by prominent female business leaders, as well as discussions on the unique perspectives that female entrepreneurs can bring to the field. By the end of the course, participants were asked to develop a business plan that could become the foundation of their new enterprise.

## Impact

The foundation's most visible impact to date has been the large amount of funds that it has helped to channel into the region, which amounts to close to ¥1.6 billion or US\$12.5 million. It has successfully dispersed these

funds to support approximately 700 projects that are making a difference at the local level.

Through the projects with major funders and the initiative with the Small and Medium Enterprise Agency, the Sanaburi Foundation has funded 224 nonprofit organizations, provided seed money for over 250 local entrepreneurs, and provided personnel costs for close to 120 individuals.

As the first and only community foundation in Tohoku, the Sanaburi Foundation also has evolved to play several different roles to support the region's civil society, including supporting capacity building for the region's nonprofit sector, and disseminating information about the progress and challenges in Tohoku's recovery and reconstruction.

## Capacity building for community nonprofits and other actors

In addition to channeling funds into Tohoku, the Sanaburi Foundation is providing technical assistance to community groups in order to make them more sustainable in the long term and to strengthen the foundations of Tohoku's nonprofit sector. One of the major challenges that the Sanaburi Foundation faces in dealing with the NPOs in the region is their lack of experience with grant writing and budgeting. They also need greater support for capacity building. In addressing these challenges, Sanaburi has organized informational seminars on a monthly basis, focusing on topics important for building capacity, such as writing grant proposals, fundraising, increasing capital, and utilizing effective communication tools such as Salesforce. The foundation has also organized four large forums, engaging people in the government, media, business, and NPO sectors to address issues central to the recovery of the region. These forums are a great opportunity for NPOs to connect with key counterparts and discuss how various sectors can work collaboratively to increase the impact of their activities. Also, it allows the nonprofit groups to identify their own unique roles in the region's recovery, and to view their work in the context of the greater recovery efforts in the region.

### Disseminating information on Tohoku's recovery

The foundation has also established itself as an information hub for individuals and groups involved in Tohoku's recovery efforts. In addition to providing information through their website on grant opportunities, upcoming events, and ongoing recovery projects by local groups, the foundation also hosts forums focusing on key issues for the region's recovery. For example, the Yoriai Nippon Ishinomaki Workshop of 2014 provided an opportunity for government and civil society leaders to come together to discuss what can be done to increase the human and capital resources in the region and to share information with regard to the types of initiatives that are already in progress. The workshop also allowed the different actors involved in the recovery process to evaluate the level of progress they can realistically expect given the current conditions and allow participants to understand the interconnected aspects of disaster recovery.

Another initiative undertaken by the foundation was a survey of 750 businesses to assess the state of

funding for Tohoku and the type of support that can be expected from the business sector in the future. The findings shed light on the characteristics of corporate giving and offer advice for NPOs on how to secure funding. Sanaburi has also organized informational seminars featuring a representative from the Japan Reconstruction Agency to elucidate the new government policy on childcare support and how it will affect the residents.

In addition to engaging individuals and groups in Tohoku, Sanaburi also targets audiences outside of Tohoku to maintain national and international interest in the region. For example, in collaboration with Save the Children, the foundation published a booklet that compiles stories of how young adults played an undeniably important role in the immediate aftermath of the disaster. The booklet has been made available in English so that lessons learned from Tohoku's experience can be applied to countries in similar situations around the world.



Yoriai Nippon Ishinomaki Workshop organized by Sanaburi in 2014

## Challenges

As the Tohoku region's first and only community foundation, Sanaburi has become an effective conduit for directing money to Tohoku's recovery efforts and has helped to strengthen the capacity of nonprofits that are working to address diverse needs in the region. There are, however, a few short-term and long-term challenges that the foundation faces that may limit the level of impact and outreach they can achieve.

The main challenge is financial. In the immediate aftermath of the disaster, money poured into the Tohoku region, but Sanaburi faced pressure to disperse funds immediately, making it difficult to fund long-term projects and activities even though reconstruction from this level of devastation is a process that will take decades. As a consequence, there is less money to tap into for long-term recovery initiatives and the Tohoku nonprofits now face the "2015 cliff," which is when the four-year commitments made by many Japanese corporate donors come to an end. It is uncertain where new funds will come from for many groups, including Sanaburi.

With funds for the region's recovery drying up, Sanaburi is focusing its attention on fundraising. However, the relatively underdeveloped state of Japan's philanthropic sector is a major obstacle, especially at a time when people's thoughts have moved on from the disaster. Especially in Tohoku, the culture of philanthropy is weak and it will take a great deal of time and effort to nurture it. The foundation's target is to eventually increase the amount of funding from within Tohoku to 40 percent. However, they realize that this will take a long time. Their challenge is compounded

by the fact that the overall scarcity of foundations in Japan means that people do not have a clear idea of what such organizations do, and there are only a few professionals with philanthropic expertise in Tohoku.

There is also a lack of funding for institution building to strengthen the infrastructure of the foundation. In Japan, groups like Sanaburi are often not permitted to include indirect costs<sup>12</sup> associated with the projects they run in their requests for project funding, and there is little funding available for nonprofit capacity building. The result is that staff members are perpetually overextended and underpaid. This makes it more difficult for organizations to attract qualified individuals to the job or invest in training sessions to further professionalize their staff.

Despite these challenges, the impact that the Sanaburi Foundation has had on post-disaster recovery and reconstruction is undeniable. The foundation serves as a key link between donors and local groups and helps smooth the transfer of funds from one side to the other while being sensitive to the needs of both parties. Its long-term timeline also encourages the foundation to approach grantmaking not as a one-time act of charity but as an investment, and this outlook has spurred the creation of educational seminars to make sure that the NPOs operate in a sustainable manner. As available donations start to dry up after 2015 despite the substantial ongoing needs in the communities affected by the disaster, it is hoped that the foundation will be successful in its fundraising efforts and thus will be able to continue its support for key community projects and for capacity building of the nonprofit sector for years to come.

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12. The term "indirect costs" refers to the general costs required for an organization to operate—rent, utilities, phones, office equipment, Internet, administrative personnel, and so on—but that are not directly related to a specific project.



## PROMOTING HEALING BY CONNECTING PEOPLE AFFECTED BY DISASTERS

ORGANIZATION Japan Medical Society of America, September 11th Families' Association, Arnhold Global Health Institute of Mount Sinai Hospital, and the Rotary Club of Englewood, NJ

PROJECT Tohoku Outreach Mission Bringing Together 9/11 and 3/11 Families<sup>13</sup>

In this unique exchange program, 9/11 survivors and families visit Tohoku to share their personal stories with those affected by the 3/11 disaster in order to help them overcome the challenges they face after experiencing such a traumatic event.

It is now commonly understood that major disasters—whether natural or man-made—can lead to various mental health issues. Survivors and those who lost loved ones in a disaster may struggle for a long time and face great difficulty in overcoming their trauma and deep grief. In some cases, they may develop serious conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), causing significant difficulty and suffering that can hinder their daily life.

The need for psychological care is now recognized as an important part of post-disaster relief activities, and when major international organizations send relief teams to disaster-stricken areas, they often include mental health experts as team members to support victims. The 3/11 disaster was no exception. The Red Cross and other international organizations sent special teams to Tohoku to address mental health care after 3/11. Within Japan, organizations such as the Japanese Society of Certified Clinical Psychologists set up special units to provide care for 3/11 victims. In addition to activities specifically targeting mental health (e.g., home visits to monitor at-risk individuals, suicide prevention hotlines, and

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13. For further information on this project, please visit <http://www.jmsa.org/tohoku-outreach-mission>.

counseling), many other activities were initiated, such as community gatherings and playgroups for children, that also aim to provide psychological relief to those affected by the disaster.



A banner welcoming 9/11 families to Japan hangs alongside a banner from Hoboken, New Jersey, which features an image of the World Trade Center

Among them, one innovative program is an outreach mission to Tohoku jointly organized by the September 11th Families' Association, Rotary clubs, the Japan Medical Society of America (JMSA), and the Arnhold Global Health Institute at Mount Sinai Hospital, with grant support from the American Airlines Kids in Need program and the United States–Japan Foundation. In this unique exchange, the survivors and families of 9/11 victims travel to Tohoku to reach out to those affected by the 3/11 disaster, listening to their stories and sharing their own experiences as a way to help ease the emotional pain. The program came from the strong desire on the part of 9/11 families to do something for Tohoku. Thanks to their sincerity and to the professional assistance and efforts by dedicated individuals, the program has been making a difference for participants—both those from Tohoku and those from New York—as they deal with their struggles after their respective disasters.

## How It Started

Even before the tragic events of 3/11, Japan had a special connection to 9/11: Origami cranes had been left at the fence around the World Trade Center site after the terrorist attacks in 2001 and those made by families of the Japanese victims of the 9/11 attack were on display at the 9/11 Tribute Center (formerly the Tribute WTC Visitor Center). In 2007, a special crane was added to

this display—a crane made by Sadako, a 12-year-old girl who had developed leukemia from exposure to the atomic bomb in Hiroshima, and whose quest to fold 1,000 paper cranes before she died in 1955 has become known worldwide.

After the earthquake and tsunami hit Tohoku, some members of the September 11th Families' Association wanted to find a way to help the victims. They knew the challenges that people face after a traumatic event, and they wished to share what they had learned in the 14 years since 2001, particularly in terms of ways to help ease the deep grief and emotional pain. As they searched for a way to help, they approached the United States–Japan Foundation and the Japan Society, two major organizations in New York in the field of US–Japan relations. With help from those organizations, they were eventually connected with JMSA and the Rotary Club of Englewood, NJ (hereafter, Englewood Rotary). JMSA, a group of healthcare professionals with a background in Japanese language or culture, and Mount Sinai Hospital, a major medical center in New York City, had been involved in medical outreach in Tohoku after the disaster and were keenly aware of the need to support mental healthcare in Tohoku over the long term. The president of the Englewood Rotary at the time (2012–2013), who happened to be Japanese, was particularly instrumental in connecting those organizations and other stakeholders, volunteering to travel to Tohoku and doing much of initial groundwork to explore the possibilities and needs through the Rotary International network.

The involvement of those three organizations and dedicated individuals paved the way for the program, and in the end, it came together as a joint initiative of JMSA, Rotary clubs, the September 11th Families' Association, and the Arnhold Global Health Institute at Mount Sinai that allowed 9/11 families and survivors (as well as representatives of the organizers) to travel from the United States to Tohoku to meet and support victims of 3/11 through personal exchanges.

## How It Works

To date, the program has sent three missions to Japan—in October 2012, August 2013, and July 2014. The delegations from the United States consist of approximately 10 people, including members of the September 11th Families' Association / 9/11 Tribute

Center, members of the Englewood Rotary, and physicians from Mount Sinai Hospital. Englewood Rotary and their local counterparts in Tohoku have been instrumental in working out the logistics and putting together the agenda in consultation with the September 11th Families' Association and the others. The involvement of a mental health professional<sup>14</sup> meanwhile, has helped the program to develop an effective format for the interaction between the participants and the 3/11 survivors.

Each trip lasts approximately 10 days, during which time the group visits schools, clinics, and tempo-



A participant from the New York Fire Department meets schoolchildren from Tohoku

rary housing complexes in Miyagi, Fukushima, and Iwate Prefectures to meet with local residents and students who were affected by the disaster. Over the past three years, they have visited 40 locations in total. The logistics of the trips are coordinated through the Rotary International network, and members of local Rotary clubs in the three prefectures have helped the US group, setting up meetings, making introductions to community leaders and residents, and coordinating public and media relations as needed.<sup>15</sup> The group revisited many of the locations on the second and third trips so that they could have a reunion with people who they had met in the previous years.

The format and settings of meetings have varied from one event to another. In some cases, US delegation members made initial presentations about their experiences from 9/11 before moving on to talk individually with Japanese participants. In another setting,

American and Japanese participants sat in small groups for conversation. Some meetings were led by a moderator, who started a session with questions to the participants. The US group also played with children and presented gifts to them when they visited schools and facilities for children. As none of the September 11th Families' Association members spoke Japanese, there were three to five translators assisting them at each meeting.

In addition to grassroots exchanges with local residents, the participants have attended academic conferences and met with government officials as well as health and other experts to share their experiences and lessons they have learned after 9/11.

## Impact

The project's impact has been seen on both sides. Despite cultural differences and language barriers, they find that they share similar sentiments and processes of grief and healing after the disasters, which have bonded the American and Japanese participants. Exchanges among the members of the 9/11 families and Tohoku residents are very personal. They share their accounts of how they lost their loved ones. They talk about their grief and concerns, such as how they worry that the memories and presence of their loved ones may be forgotten as time goes by. They have also found that symbolic images, such as the single pine tree in Rikuzentakata and a callery pear tree that survived the World Trade Center disaster, can give them a sense of hope during difficult times.

Often, Japanese participants are reserved at the beginning, but they slowly open up as they see the sincerity of the American participants. Sharing experiences and talking about their feelings is known to help people cope with emotional difficulties, but when exchanges take place among people who otherwise might have little in common—residents in small towns in Tohoku and families from New York City—the experience seems to become even more intense and leaves a strong impact on those involved. The

14. Dr. Craig Katz, a psychiatrist associated with Mount Sinai's Global Health Center, has been involved in the project from the first trip. Medical students joined the group for the third trip and helped conduct evaluations.

15. The trips were financially supported by foundations and organizations in the US-Japan field as well as the Rotary Foundation and corporations.





At some meetings, American and Japanese participants sat in small groups for conversations facilitated by interpreters

genuineness of the American participants has clearly touched the Japanese participants.

The program has also had a strong impact on the American participants. While they initially hoped to help the 3/11 survivors, the trip to Japan provided time to reflect and think about their own paths. The following comment from one of the American participants reveals the powerful effect of the exchange:

It was truly an inspirational and life-changing experience. The trip to Japan was more than words could ever describe, and I am still processing all that we experienced as well as the enormity of what the Japanese people experienced on and after 3/11/11. The trip also made me take pause and reflect upon myself, not only as a leader and mentor with a goal of helping others overcome personal loss and tragedy, but as an educator that inspires others to make a difference. I have learned that I have a passion and calling for humanitarian and philanthropic work, and I now know where I truly want to invest my energy going forward. You have helped me gain this clarity by the opportunity you gave me to visit Japan and to outreach with many Japanese people<sup>16</sup>

One key aspect of the program that has helped it succeed is that the missions take place annually. As noted above, in the second and third years of the program, the group went back to many of the same locations, meeting the residents for a second and third time. Many of the American participants from the first mission returned for the second and third missions as well. This approach helps build stronger bonds between the American and Japanese participants, and in particular

has helped 3/11 victims to open up even more as they were reunited with their American friends.

The involvement of mental health experts has without question been a great advantage for the program. With their medical expertise and experience in post-disaster care, they have been able to help develop a robust program with an appropriate and effective format. They also provided tools to assess impact and monitor progress, which has helped in communicating the results and providing lessons to a wider audience and in connecting the program to a network of stakeholders.

In addition to the program's structure, the personalities of the individual participants have also been an important key to making the program a success. The September 11th Families' Association does in fact pay close attention to this aspect of the program and carefully thinks through the personalities and experience level of their volunteers when they select members to invite. While only one of the participants from the association had any prior connection to Japan, all participants have developed a close bond with the county after taking part in this program.

The program has had great symbolic significance as well. During the first trip in 2012, the delegation brought a statue of an origami crane fabricated out of steel recovered from the remains of the World Trade Center—it was a symbolic return of Sadako's crane that had been shared with New York's victims. The statue was dedicated to comforting the children and to the recovery of Tohoku and became one of the



Participants from the United States developed strong bonds with the local residents

16. Japanese Medical Society of America, "Tohoku Outreach Mission," <http://www.jmsa.org/tohoku-outreach-mission>.

first monuments after the 3/11 disaster. Set in a park in Koriyama, Fukushima, the crane faces the direction of New York and symbolizes the ties between people who were brought together through the shared experience of traumatic loss, and who have helped each other overcome their struggles after two devastating disasters. The story about Sadako's crane was also made into a children's book, *Message on a Wing*, in which her crane flies to Japan bringing hopes and prayers from New York to the people in Japan. The book was presented to all schools and kindergartens in Fukushima, hoping to bring comfort to the children and their communities.

## Challenges

One challenge the program faced in the initial stages was how to bring the program to fruition. The 9/11 families had great compassion and a strong desire to help the people in Tohoku, but they had limited connections to Japan. This was overcome through the involvement of various organizations that worked together to put the program together, although their involvement came about, to a certain degree, by chance. The September 11th Families' Association approached the United States–Japan Foundation, with which it had worked in the past, and this led to their introduction to the Japan Society of New York. The Japan Society invited them to attend a conference where they eventually met JMSA and Englewood Rotary representatives. While it was not a calculated move by any party, a successful partnership was formed in the end, and with the work of dedicated individuals, the program became a reality and has achieved great impact to date.

The second major concern was the language barrier. The American members of the missions did not speak Japanese; in fact, for most of the 9/11 survivors and families in the delegation, it was their first time traveling to Japan. This turned out not to be a problem, however, in large part thanks to translators who took a personal interest in the project. They had three to five Japanese translators with them at any given time that they could rely on. In addition to their language



The memorial in Koriyama, Fukushima, made with steel from the World Trade Center

skills, those translators had a great passion for this assignment because of their personal interest in and dedication to helping people in Tohoku. They often went beyond just translating the language and helped American and Japanese participants communicate with each other with sincerity and emotional conviction, despite their cultural differences. Some of the translators traveled with the group throughout the entire itinerary, and also came back for the second and third missions.

Overcoming those initial concerns, the program has developed into a successful initiative to support the mental health of those affected by 3/11, and it has made a great difference to those who are involved in or have been touched by this program.



## OTHER MODEL RESPONSES TO 3/11

In addition to the programs profiled in this report, civil society organizations launched a number of other creative initiatives in response to 3/11. The following is a sample of some additional programs with components that are worth replicating after future disasters.

### **ETIC—Dispatching Support Staff for Nonprofit Organizations**

Project: Migiude Program (Right-hand Person Program)

Website: [www.etic.or.jp/english](http://www.etic.or.jp/english)

Nonprofit organizations responding to the Japan disaster found themselves woefully understaffed, so ETIC (Entrepreneurial Training for Innovative Communities) launched a program to hire and dispatch promising future leaders on three-month to one-year assignments as support staff to assist nonprofits, small businesses, and other groups in the disaster zone. ETIC covered the costs for their salaries and training, and these “fellows” served as right-hand men (or women) to the groups’ leaders while getting a foot in the door in the nonprofit field. Over a period of two years, 135 fellows were dispatched to help with 78 separate initiatives.



### **Institute of International Education (IIE)—Keeping Exchange Students in School**

Project: Emergency Student Fund

Website: [www.iie.org/What-We-Do/Emergency-Assistance/Emergency-Student-Fund](http://www.iie.org/What-We-Do/Emergency-Assistance/Emergency-Student-Fund)

When disasters strike, families with children in college—especially those studying abroad in costly places—struggle to continue paying tuition and living expenses. However, students who drop out find themselves in a deep hole. They return home to a disaster zone with no degree and dismal job prospects. After 3/11, IIE established an emergency fund utilizing prior funding from the Freeman Foundation and set out to identify students around the United States from the disaster area. This provided more than 100 Japanese students with \$400,000 in emergency grants to continue their studies, keeping them from having their futures further compromised by the disaster that struck their homes.

### **PlaNet Finance Japan & Mercy Corps—Innovative Financing for Small Businesses**

Project: Tohoku Small Business Recovery Program

Website: [www.mercycorps.org/research-resources/small-business-recovery-program-evaluation](http://www.mercycorps.org/research-resources/small-business-recovery-program-evaluation)

With their businesses destroyed, many small business owners in Tohoku had difficulty accessing new lines of credit to rebuild, especially while still carrying large debts for facilities and equipment that had been lost. In response, Mercy Corps and PlaNet Finance Japan forged a partnership with local banks. The two nonprofit groups provided small grants to cover the costs of restarting businesses, as well as subsidies to lighten the cost of hiring employees. Meanwhile, the banks offered loans at highly preferential terms, with the nonprofits covering interest payments for the first two years. During its three years in operation, the program supported more than 350 businesses and 1,700 jobs, helping the businesses get back on their feet, allowing the banks to regain customers, and expanding local employment.



### **Various Organizations—Collecting and Restoring Family Photos**

A range of nonprofit organizations and volunteers in Japan mobilized to collect and “wash” family photos found in the mud after the tsunami, which were then displayed at evacuation centers and other local facilities to be sorted through and picked up by their owners. “Photo washing” groups were even formed around the country to clean and dry the pictures and then ship them back to Tohoku. Recognizing the potential psychological impact that returning photos can have on survivors who may have lost everything else, major corporations played an important role as well. Fuji Film, for example, launched a Photo Rescue Project that brought together thousands of volunteers—both company employees and the general public—to clean and restore hundreds of thousands of photos.





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