

The Report #1 on the Workshop “Care for the Mind and Body”

by Junko Hanamitsu, NPO Kaibunsha, May 25th, 2011

We started our support activity at affected area, in a style of exercise workshop “Care for the mind and body” by dancers at evacuation centers.

From May 20th to 22nd, we had the first workshop trip at main district of Miyako city, Iwate prefecture. Our member includes a contemporary dancer/choreographer, Yoko Higashino from dance company Baby-q, an assistant/ driver/ scripter, Toshio Kajiwara and Chizuru Matsumoto (Kaibunsha), and me (Junko Hanamitsu, the workshop coordinator). This workshop project is carries out in close cooperation with NPO Japan Contemporary Dance Network (JCDN) . And we would like to express our appreciation for a generous sponsorship by Bloomberg for covering the accomodation and transportation fees.

Workshop Schedule:

May 21st (sat) 10:00 @ Atago elementary school (Evacuation center, 60 evacuees)

13:00 @ The 2nd Miyako junior high school (Evacuation center, 78 evacuees)

15:00 @ Kuwagasaki elementary school (Evacuation center, 74 evacuees)

We also visited the largest evacuation center in the city afterward.

(SEA ARENA, Miyako Civil Gymnasium, 150 evacuees).



We had about 30 participants at each workshop. Mostly they were seniors, younger children and their mothers, and volunteer staff, who spent their daytime at the evacuation center on the day. The dancer and assisntat went back to Tokyo on May 22nd, and Chizuru and I stayed there to organize the next workshop trip, and visited three other evacuation centers in Tsugaruishi district, in south of Miyako city. After visiting them, I came to know that the situation there changes everyday, and nobody anticipates what would occur even in two weeks. At the same time, I realized that there are many people who are old-age, exhausted, and have big anxieties. Then I felt there is something that we can do for them, they can use our help.

“Do you have stiff shoulders or back pain?” “Would you join our exercise workshop to relieve tension?”

At first, the elderlies, who were reluctant to do the exercise, came to follow us, and at last, volunteers, officers, almost all of people there joined us. The workshop team got into evacuee’s group and took care of those people who were too shy to join the exercise and stayed at their areas. The dancer, Yoko’s instruction was excellent.



"I will be able to sleep tight because of the exercise for the first time in a long time", an elderly man said. "My neck didn't move, but now it does!" "That exercise eases myself so much. I like to continue to do it everyday." After the workshop, the whole atmosphere in the evacuation center was completely changed. Everybody started to talk and joke each other, it might be because their bodies felt relaxed. It was the first time to see their smiles.



Honestly, I was concerned if the workshop would succeed even when I received the kind acceptance from each center president. For the first time I visited the evacuation centers, I only found no words for elderly people whose eyes were closed and just sat on their legs. But this time I could see their smiles, talking and holding each one of their hands. At the moment I really felt glad that I visited them. Thank you very much, Yoko. You did a terrific job!



It takes about six hours from Tokyo to Miyako city since the transportation is brutal. Fortunately, we came across an accommodation that someone has just cancelled after calling almost all the hotels in town. Most hotels along the coast of Sanriku (in the Tohoku area) were damaged by tsunami, so first we were prepared with our sleeping bags in case we couldn't find anywhere to stay.

【Photo : The 2nd Tsugaruishi Junior High School】

At the beginning before we arrived there, we planned a schedule to visit three different places in each day, six places in two days per trip. However, we considered that six places could be too exhausted for the dancer physically and mentally much more than usual workshops.

I assume that we can offer the workshop at those evacuation centers until the end of June. Especially once the elderies started moving into the temporary housing, it would be hard to take care for them. I contacted the general manager of Iwate Medical Support Network Center to offer the workshop, which also had given similar workshops in Yamada-cho, Iwate prefecture, with a street dancer Sasuga Minami. I tried to offer our support, but the manager was too busy to coordinate or match our workshop. I also went to volunteer center at Council of Social Welfare in town again to ask if they could match the place where we offer the workshop, but the application form for the coordinating/matching the workshop that we submitted previous week was still there without process. It seemed impossible to proceed our plan since the government officer at the local evacuation center rotates their duties every week. If we would like to offer the workshop there, we must coordinate everything on our own. I also realized that many volunteer

performers visit major evacuation centers, but the remote areas where transportation is extremely limited. I am planning to visit another three or four evacuation centers in Miyako city with a dance company, Selenographica next time from 8th to 10th of June.

When we were about to leave the largest evacuation center SEA ARENA, Miyako Civil Gymnasium where we visited this time, a young woman came to us and said, "My house was swept out by tsunami. It is very hard and sad to believe that my mother is dead since I haven't seen her dead. People here are completely exhausted after having lived like this for a long time. Some of them suffer mentally, and they wouldn't be able to accept your kindness. But even so, I think that they feel happy when you come to see us here. Please be prepared and come see us again"

A lot of emotion filled up my heart. I do not think what we did counts for anything. There is nothing we can do with their pain and grief. But still, I would like to find small, little things that could be meaningful to them.



【 Photo : A view from outside of Kuwagasaki elementary school 】