

to the children have space for sports," explains Satoru Gamou, director of the Hakkō Project NPO in Rikuzentakata. "There isn't even enough space for a 100-meter dash on sports days."

Residents have been complaining since the temporary schools were first erected in September 2011, but 3½ years on, much remains the same. Gamou's fond memories of the area's once-strong volleyball and baseball programs are now tinged with regret.

"This April, the new Takata High School will be ready, but there is no sports field, and gym classes will still be held in Ofunato, over 30 km away," says Gamou, 51, who now helps run the temporary housing complex built on the Rikuzen Takata Mobilia campsite he managed before 3/11. "My son, who plays baseball, would have attended Takahata High School, once a baseball powerhouse. Now, nothing remains."

YOUNG AS YOU FEEL



Shirokichi is no spring chicken, but he has a song in his heart and a spring in his step that makes him look like he's listening to music and ready to break out in a dance routine. He's a tiny fellow of 14 years, weighs less than most cats and could even stand to put on a bit of weight. But right now, being light makes it easier on the lops he loves to curl up in. Shirokichi could spend his days in laps and he'll come over and ask to be picked up. He loves people, and after his former owner passed away, he could use some much-needed reassurance, love and affection to fill the emptiness he surely feels. Shirokichi may not have all that much time left, but we are hoping to find someone with a big heart who will reach out, love him, and make his final years happy ones. MACHIKO NAKANO PHOTO

If you are interested in adopting Shirokichi, email ARK at Tokyoark@arkbank.net or call 050-1557-2783 Monday to Saturday (bilingual) for more information. Tokyo ARK is an NPO founded by Briton Elizabeth Oliver. It is dedicated to rescuing and rehoming abandoned animals. All animals are vaccinated, neutered and microchipped. Prospective owners are requested to undergo a screening process.



coast of Iwate near Kamaishi, keeping kids in school has always been a struggle, as many quit after junior high to join their parents in the fishing industry, and tensions between inlanders and coastal towns regularly spill over into the schools. Before 2011, Otsuchi schools were known across Iwate for rowdy students and low educational standards, but residents agree with Goto that the students themselves possess a new maturity.

Miyako Ogayu, whose husband is head of Daienji Temple in Sendai, has run a reading club for the last eight years serving the community in Otsuchi. Ogayu has long seen books as a gateway to new worlds, and she redoubled her efforts after the disaster, expanding the club to a wider area and helping support young mothers. She too prefers to emphasize the positives that have sprung from adversity. "The children's horizons have been

attention to the behavior of those around them anymore."

Katsumi Sawaguchi, a longtime resident and community leader, agrees.

"Unfortunately, some of the parents receiving aid have started to take the aid for granted, and they pass this attitude on to their children," he says. "Other parents are so concerned with making a living that they can't think of anything else. Parents hesitate to discipline their children since the kids have been through so much, and volunteers take on the same attitude. Children have learned they will get their way, no matter what they do."

Sawaguchi, a retired businessman and accomplished cut-paper artist, taught his art in schools in Kamaishi as a volunteer before the disaster. Since the 2011 tsunami, he has expanded his vol-

Minamisoma, a small seaside town only 25 km from the wrecked Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, and its neighbors are still reeling from the triple disaster. Driving in on the Joban Expressway, I am struck by the stretches of nothingness. Instead of speed limits, the highway signs warn us of the radiation level.

Psychiatrist Arinobu Hori moved from Tokyo to Minamisoma a year after the earthquake and tsunami, when the evacuation order was lifted, to help residents and take up a job at Fukushima Medical University's Department of Disaster and Comprehensive Medicine. Hori also sees the lack of exercise and growing discipline problems among Fukushima children as symptoms of a larger issue: tired

enough people here" to support the remaining residents, he says. "The government is spending too much money on construction and decontamination. These things are important, I agree, but the government should pay more for specialists who can come and take care of the people, and to the few specialists who are already here."

Known for their tenacity, Tohoku residents such as Gamou, Ogayu and Sawaguchi soldier on, determined to do their best for the children, despite all the unanswered questions. Outside NPOs continue to play an important role, too. One success story has been the "collaboration schools" in Onagawa, Miyagi Prefecture, and Otsuchi run by Tokyo-based educational NPO Katariba. Named because it is a "collaboration between local teachers, board of educa-

tion, reconstruction and recovery of the school in Otsuchi? With school communities fractured, how can people rebuild and reconnect in Rikuzentakata? When will the young caregivers — the pediatricians, day care workers and nurses — and teachers return to Minamisoma to provide support to overwhelmed parents? What do students need most now in the affected areas?

Four years on from the disaster, the people of Tohoku deserve some answers.

Special thanks to Kerry Shioya — guide, translator and storyteller — whose introductions and assistance were invaluable. Learning Curve covers issues related to education in Japan. Your comments and story ideas: community@japantimes.co.jp

In lycra and online, expats aid 3/11 recovery effort

LIFELINES



Louise George Kittaka

Four years on from the catastrophic events of March 2011, Japan's foreign community is continuing to show its support for Tohoku in myriad ways. This week Lifelines introduces two examples of how foreign nationals are pitching in and having fun in the process.

Lovers of classic rock will probably be familiar with the Moody Blues' atmospheric hit from 1967, "Nights in White Satin," but they may not be aware of the Knights in White Lycra (KIWL), riding to the rescue on their bicycles!

The Tokyo-based charity group came together over a festive meal in December 2012, when a group of British friends decided to combine their love of cycling with raising money for a good cause.

"The specific aim of KIWL is to leave a legacy to this country that some of its members may only temporarily call home, and raise money for sustainable community-based projects," explains member Robert Williams. "Clearly, the 3/11 tragedy was very specific to this goal, and this is where our support has gone so far."

The group's main activity is an annual sponsored long-distance bike ride. In April 2013, a group rode 320 km from Tokyo to Minamisoma, Fukushima Prefecture, over three days, raising ¥2.7 million for the Save Minamisoma Project, which was helping to supply the town with fresh food and water.

"The first blizzard for 40 years forced us to abandon our final day, but we returned in June to complete the ride," says Williams.

Last year's test of endurance took place in May, with KIWL covering 500 km over four days from Tokyo to Minamisoma, Miyagi Prefecture. Their efforts resulted in a ¥5 million donation to the Japan-based NPO group OGA for Aid, helping to fund the construction of a small vegetable processing factory.

"This factory is now a sustainable business, selling produce and creating livelihoods for its employees," notes Williams. Impressed with OGA's efforts to help agricultural recovery, KIWL have chosen to support them again with their 2015 ride.

"After much consideration we chose OGA's Place to Grow project," says Williams. "The emphasis of Place to Grow is on agricultural education of the region's children, providing a physical place for them to go after school and learn from the area's older generation about the farming process."

It is hoped this project will help foster future careers in the agriculture sector, as well as providing a haven for young people still dealing with the stress of daily life in cramped temporary housing.

On May 15, a multinational team of some 30 riders, including several women, will once again embark on the journey up to Minamisoma. Although the team for this year's endurance ride is already in place, anyone interested in getting involved in future events is urged to get in touch.

"We are hoping to stage our first ever one-day fund-raising cycle ride later in the year, which will be a gentle 50 km

ride along one of Tokyo's rivers, where all-comers can participate," says Williams. In addition, the group hosts regular fundraising events throughout the year, such as pub quizzes and wine tastings.

KIWL is also keen to hear from companies and individuals who might be interested in sponsoring the May 2015 endurance ride. Details can be found on the group's website.

Just in case anyone has the idea that KIWL are all elite athletes, Williams is keen to set the record straight.

"Our members range from beginners to very experienced cyclists. A large number have long said goodbye to their youth! The members are simply doing what they love and simultaneously raising charity funds, knowing they are improving people's lives."

Maryam Britton, a video director with Turkish and Iranian background, has made her home in the Tohoku region since 2010. After graduating with a master's degree from Tohoku University last year, she started working for a Sendai-based media company.

Britton is in charge of the English version of the Revival Calendar project, a series of blog entries that introduce subjects related to the revival of the Tohoku region post-3/11.

"It started at the initiation of Sendai city, and then AriTV, an Internet broadcast television station and media company, took charge of the project," Britton explains. "We introduce one subject a day, either with photos or video, accompanied by text. It is directed at a foreign audience as much as Japanese citizens, and so from the very beginning it had

both Japanese and English versions."

The aim of the Revival Calendar is to simultaneously bring awareness of recovery efforts and promote tourism in the region.

"One of the greatest contributions we can bring in terms of revival of the tsunami-affected areas is to help the local businesses grow and flourish," says Britton. "We want to show the great aspects of Tohoku. For example, I made a series of videos to introduce local crafts from the Akiu area of Miyagi Prefecture. There are also videos of local gourmet food, sightseeing spots, tourism events and festivals."

While Britton is the only foreign national employed at the company, she says that many foreign students in the Tohoku area have been involved as project volunteers from the outset, helping to give them a voice.

"We also have a sister project called Fantasia Tohoku, in which foreign nationals write about Tohoku culture in nine different languages on nine different Facebook pages. This is also to promote Tohoku's tourism for recovery purposes, and it is run by Tohoku University foreign students."

Britton points out that the Revival Calendar project has become a bridge to link foreigners in the community with the revival efforts, both helping to make them aware of what is going on and encouraging them to get involved.

"Most of the information online is only in Japanese, and even though most foreigners can speak sufficient Japanese, it is not the same when it comes to reading and writing," says Britton. "We try to transcend that barrier with the Revival Calendar's English website. I appear in my own videos to make them relatable



Tour de Tohoku: Robert Williams leads the Knights in White Lycra out on last year's charity endurance ride, which covered 500 km over four days from Tokyo to Minamisoma, Miyagi Prefecture. IVAN DOHERTY

to a foreign audience and make them feel like they are indeed a part of the community."

Knights in White Lycra: www.kiwl.net. OGA for Aid: www.ogaforaid.org. Revival Calendar (English): <http://en.re-tohoku.jp>. Fantasia Tohoku: www.ari-tv.jp/fantasia. Do you know about a citizens' group or of any other helpful resources? Comments and questions: lifelines@japantimes.co.jp