

## Toward Continued, Concrete Support

Miyagi Prefecture Mental Health and Welfare Association

Miyagi Disaster Mental Health Care Center

Chairman – Hidekatsu Shirasawa

We now approach our third year since that day. As we speak, more than 100,000 individuals are left with no other choice than to live in trying conditions, in emergency temporary housing or private chartered housing. We all want nothing more than the rebuilding and revitalization of the foundation of our personal and communal spaces.

The other day, the university and various support organizations were conducting health surveys among disaster survivors at the prefectural and municipal levels. The results of these surveys paint a grim picture indeed, one that runs quite contrary to what those of us who coordinated these efforts had hoped for. General illness affects around 20% of individuals who were moved into emergency or private chartered housing, and survey using the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K6) of mental health revealed that 9.5% of these individuals scored  $\geq 13$ , corresponding to severe mental illness. Thus, given the fact that most survivors have experienced mental and physical issues for some time, we must devote our full strength to ensuring a priori prevention of serious consequences.

Looking back, the support that poured in from all over Japan enabled us to commence short-term mental health care activities to support the many disaster survivors who had met with catastrophic circumstances. As we worked to tend to these individuals' yet fresh wounds, others cried out for their need for medium- to long-term mental health care support. Six months later, we had drawn up a rough framework for such activities, and the MDMHCC was established in December 2011. By April 2012, we had begun full-scale operations.

The primary roles of the MDMHCC are to provide intimate, personalized support to the many disaster survivors in dire circumstances and ensure the continuation thereof, to aid the supporters working closely with disaster survivors, and to rebuild and revitalize regional mental health infrastructure throughout Miyagi. Over the course of the past year, we have made use of our home visitations, counseling, and salon activities for disaster survivors to raise public awareness through pamphlets and so on, and to hold various lectures and workshops. Moving forward, it is vital that we continue to conduct activities closely tailored to the needs of disaster survivors and their communities.

Mental health care is an interactive, bidirectional endeavor between survivors and supporters, and it exists within the context of comprehensive, coordinated activities built on a foundation of acceptance, empathy, and support, made possible by families, communities, close relationships with supporters, and the involvement of specialists and professionals. With this ethos in mind, we aim to provide continued, concrete support in the years to come.