

Initiatives of the Japanese Association of Psychiatric Social Workers
Dispatching Short-Term Supporters to the Miyagi Disaster Mental Health Care Center

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1. History of Our Initiatives

In response to the Great East Japan Earthquake, the JAPSW began to conduct observations in disaster-affected areas and establish contacts at the national, prefectural, and municipal levels; through these relationships, in FY 2011, we were able to continuously dispatch JAPSW members to support mental health and welfare activities in Higashimatsushima, Miyagi and Minamisoma, Fukushima.

In FY 2012, we had newly established the Great East Japan Earthquake Reconstruction Support Headquarters, and as we were exploring how to conduct new operations therein as a national-level organization of psychiatric social workers; Yuichi Watanabe of the MDMHCC, an organization that was already part of the planning of the Reconstruction Support Headquarters, approached us with the idea of dispatching JAPSW members to the Center as short-term temporary employees to assist with the large volume of requests received from prefectural municipalities.

In response, we established a reconstruction support human resources bank in June of that year, and after recruitment, we began dispatching staff to take part in support activities on July 2.

2. Actual Initiatives

In FY 2011, our support activities in disaster-affected areas were self-contained efforts such as the procurement of lodging and vehicles for various activities. At the time, our work with the Center consisted of submission of a list of members capable of participating in their activities; the creation of actual activity shift schedules, selection of municipalities to receive support, and procurement of lodging was entirely handled by the Center. However, because we recognized the critical importance of pre-, intra-, and post-activity support for members taking part in support activities, the Reconstruction Support Headquarters appointed a support supervisor, established a dedicated support line, and set up a mailing list, all of which served as a means for participants to exchange information and for the Reconstruction Support Headquarters to provide information to them.

The activities of dispatch members were limited to weekdays and rotated on a weekly basis. Initially, the Stem Center in Sendai served as our base of operations, and we traveled to the places we had received support requests from: Natori, Iwanuma, Matsushima, Higashimatsushima, Shiogama, Taiwa, and Onagawa, among others. From September 18, 2012 onward, because the Center managed to procure a hotel inside the city of Ishinomaki for us to use, our de facto base of operations shifted to Ishinomaki, and we began to serve as assistants to Center staff dispatched to Higashimatsushima and/or Onagawa. Further, after negotiating with the Center, we determined that transportation fees in situations where the number of days of activity were low would be raised via JAPSW's Reconstruction Support Activity Fundraiser; one rental car was also procured for use as a means of travel between Ishinomaki and places of activity.

The majority of dispatched members were psychiatric social workers who had participated in the JAPSW's support efforts for disaster-affected areas the previous year; these individuals understood the limitations of short-term support and acknowledged that their role was to assist and supplement the work of Center staff. As the personnel recruitment activities of the Center were expected to secure enough staff to manage their workload, the short-term supporter dispatch activities of the JAPSW came to a close on December 28, 2012.

- Activity period: July 2–December 28, 2012
- Number of dispatched members: 28
- Total number of active days: 150