

Activity Report of the “Heart and Mind Counseling/Relaxation Salon” Temporary Housing Support Project

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1. Introduction

It has been three years since the Great East Japan Earthquake. March 11, 2011 is a day we cannot forget.

An unprecedented earthquake and the tsunami that came after it swallowed up many buildings, a great deal of property, and far too many precious lives. The nuclear accident, which has yet to be fully resolved, and the damage caused by subsequent rumors—all of these damages have brought about major changes in the lives of residents of affected areas. For the past three years, those who have been forced to move to container-type temporary housing or private rental housing have lived with psychological, social, and economic problems.

Immediately after the earthquake, there were voices at our hospital saying, “Is there any support we can provide for the survivors?” and “We have to provide support.” In response to these voices, we decided to start supporting individuals in container-type temporary housing in Natori City and Yamamoto Town with the agreement of the hospital’s officials, including Director Kodaka. Our support activities started in actuality in June, about two months after the disaster.

2. Heart and Mind Counseling/Relaxation Salon Activity Details

The “Heart and Mind Counseling/Relaxation Salon” temporary housing support project, started in June 2011, was held 14 times in Natori and 10 times in Yamamoto in FY 2012. In FY 2013, it was implemented 10 times in Yamamoto Town, and the initiative was concluded on February 21, 2014. The number of participants over these three years was 496 in Natori and 384 in Yamamoto, yielding a total of 880. The support staff consisted mainly of doctors, occupational therapists, and psychiatric social workers, as well as pharmacists and registered dietitians. We also received the cooperation of the Natori City Medical Association. From 2012, it was implemented as a commissioned project of the MDMHCC in collaboration with their staff.



Schedule

	Dr	Ns., PSW, OT
13:30		exception/blood pressure measurement/call-outs
14:00		Health lectures
14:30	Individual counseling	Stretching
		Handicrafts*
15:30		Tea party
		Clean-up

*Bookmarks, chopstick stands, fans, streamers, Christmas cards, acrylic scrubbing brushes, etc.

Programs were designed so that mental problems could be worked on without bringing them to the fore. We decided to conduct blood pressure measurement, counseling, and health lectures (doctors, pharmacists, registered dietitians, etc.), followed by stretching, teatime, handicrafts sessions, and so on, overseen mainly by occupational therapists. Through this agenda, we tried to enable participants to express their anxiety and traumatic experiences in as natural a way as possible.

The number of participants varied from around 10 to 20 depending on the housing complex. Prior to the start of support activities, PR activities were conducted alongside individual visits so that elderly people, people living alone, and people with disabilities would not be isolated. Depending on the size of the container-type temporary housing development, the age group of the residents, their original place of residence, and so on, the situation of the participants and the issues they brought up differed, and thus our support efforts have involved a bit of trial and error.



3. Significance of this Activity as Seen Through Participant Questionnaires

In FY 2013, the third year of our activities, we conducted a questionnaire survey during container-type temporary housing support in Yamamoto Town. The results are shown below. The number of respondents was 65. Of these, 24% had something they were worried about. To my surprise, only 16% of the respondents answered that they had consulted with a doctor. In terms of motivation for participation, 68% were intrigued by the leaflets distributed to all households in advance, indicating that the leaflets encouraged participation. As for programs that participants were glad to have taken part in, 70% chose handicrafts, 64% chose tea talks, and 62% chose stretching, indicating the popularity of hands-on programs.

4. Thoughts of Participants and Supporters

At every venue, many people participated because they wanted to speak and to be heard, and many expressed their experiences associated with the earthquake and the stress of living in the cramped quarters of container-type temporary housing. In addition, a local public health nurse commented, "It would be nice if the participants could come home with a smile at the end of making things."

In January 2014, we had a meeting with Yamamoto Town regarding the coming year, and it was decided that this project would be handed over to the MDMHCC; thus, our institution's support project came to an end. On March 14, our supporters held a temporary housing support general meeting, where we looked back on our past three years as supporters. We received feedback including the following: "The fact that we were able to start our work quickly after the disaster and continue to develop it led to a sense that the residents of temporary housing were really changing for the better, and that made me feel good." In this way, we were able to recap the activities of our supporters and confirm that our involvement achieved what is generally expected of a medical institution.

5. Points for Container-Type Temporary Housing Support

This concludes our report on the Heart and Mind Counseling/Relaxation Salon project we have engaged in over the past three years. Through this activity, we have learned a great deal, not only as supporters but about life and how to live it. Overall, we have learnt about the following:

- ① Providing knowledge
- ② Providing a place for people to speak freely
- ③ Providing a place where people can take care of their minds and bodies
- ④ Providing a place for participants to independently get involved in activities
- ⑤ Providing a place for continuous support
- ⑥ Allowing professionals to work together to manage programs and enable them to use their professional strengths therein
- ⑦ Referring issues that become visible to affiliated organizations

Finally, we would like to extend our gratitude to those who assisted us in the management of the Heart and Mind Counseling/Relaxation Salon project.