

## Participating in the Heart and Mind Counseling/Relaxation Salon

Supporters' Club  
Occupational Therapist – Maki Suzuki

### 1. Introduction

In May 2012, with the thought that there might be some way I could contribute to post-disaster efforts, I registered with the Supporters' Club of the MDMHCC. In May 2013, I received a request to participate in and cooperate with the staff of the MDMHCC in holding the Heart and Mind Counseling/Relaxation Salon in Yamamoto Town. This salon project was contracted to the Miyagi Psychiatric Center by the MDMHCC, and I participated a total of nine times between June 2013 and February 2014.

### 2. Activity Details

The salons were held in prefabricated temporary housing, public disaster housing meetinghouses, and resident assembly halls in areas that were being rebuilt independently. Before the start of the salon, we called for participation via door-to-door visits in temporary housing in the surrounding area where we determined participation to be possible. Flyers for the salon were distributed to all households by the day before the event, but in the meantime, we had called out again to solicit participation. Since the event was held on weekday afternoons, many elderly people came, while we had relatively few opportunities to meet younger people. While some were pleased, stating "I've been looking forward to this ever since I saw your announcement" and "You did this last year, didn't you?" others refused, even if I managed to meet them, saying "I'd rather not" or "I don't think this is for me."

Individuals had various reasons for participating; some were interested in the lectures, and others simply wanted to take part in handicrafts. Some participants had a prospect of reconstruction and others did not, and the teacher's lectures sometimes developed like group work. Some people were eager to talk about their experiences of the disaster, and others were confused by such stories and stopped talking. However, I felt that it was important for individuals to have the time and place to express their feelings among people with experiences similar to their own.

After the teacher's lecture, we held individual consultations and Relaxation Salon activities. Participants seemed to be able to let loose, releasing stress by stretching and making things while enjoying tea.

In the individual consultation, I met various people, some who had just begun talking about their thoughts, others who talked about their positive thoughts with full energy, and still more who said, "I still don't feel alright, but I thought I'd come out today." My role was not to directly ask about the possibility of consultation but rather to sense any discomfort caused by the atmosphere and to share that information with Psychiatric Center staff so that that individual would be connected to the local government.

### 3. How I Feel About this Past Year

Through my activities in FY 2013, I observed a gap between the energetic people who are heading for independence and those who are uncertain. The former seem to be actively participating in activities other than the salon, but the latter still seem unwilling to engage in outside activities. In addition, some said that they had given up participating in the salon owing to poor physical function.

At the same time, at salons for public disaster housing residents, I was sometimes asked, "Do you still think we need support?" As the transition to public disaster housing progresses, it will be necessary to transition away from post-disaster survivor support and toward community-based peacetime support.

Finally, because the salon was held on weekday afternoons, there was little participation from young people or workers. I, therefore, feel we were unable to fully grasp the situation of these people. Residents commented that it would be better to have them come in the evening or on holidays. I think it is necessary to consider how we will respond to needs in the future as they continue to change.