

Greetings

What it means to “connect.”

Miyagi Prefecture Mental Health and Welfare Association

Miyagi Disaster Mental Health Care Center

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Ten years have passed since the Great East Japan Earthquake, and since the launch of the Miyagi Disaster Mental Health Care Center. From FY2021, this publication will be delivered to you as an annual activity report, rather than a bulletin.

We wish to express our sincere gratitude to everyone who has overseen and supported the activities of this Center. This Center is currently in its 11th year of its overall 15 years of activity, with about two-thirds having passed. We have approached the “second phase” of the Center, where we transition toward the end and gradually reduce the scale of our work.

We have placed great importance on “connections” while working in mental health care after major disasters. Major disasters greatly impact a community, disrupting connections between individuals and communities, and shaking the foundations for recovery. We, the support workers, have devised numerous methods and created initiatives for individuals to connect with their communities, so that they can regain autonomy over their own lives. However, the core initiatives of this work have been questioned at a fundamental level due to the spread of COVID-19. To prevent infection, we had to refrain from connecting with people face-to-face. For us, COVID-19 has become an opportunity to reconsider the essence of the comfort that comes from “connections.”

Hugging. Holding hands. Talking. Simply being together. There are many forms of connection, but which element was considered important in our activities? When we think about it, the meaning of the word “connection” is very vague. I think that it refers to a sense of belongingness. If we cannot meet in person, then I think that it is necessary to strive to make you feel that you belong and that you have a place here. In other words, I think it means to confirm and strengthen the identity of everyone within the community. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many efforts have been made to connect people and prevent them from being separated from the community using the internet. We also need to be flexible to remain current with these evolving trends.

Even in earthquake reconstruction activities, we face new problems a decade later, and we must make changes and innovations according to each circumstance. Still, we hope that we can tenaciously, simply, and honestly work on “connection,” and contribute to creating a strong and warm community. We would be grateful for your continued guidance and encouragement in the future.