

## **Meeting of 89 children and 176 adults! “The 2<sup>nd</sup> Tohoku Children’s Summit ~ A town that everybody can love” (May 9, 2012)**

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Looking toward the reconstruction of communities and developing better communities through involving children’s opinions and participation, we have been conducting “Speaking Out from Tohoku ~ Building better communities through the participation of children!” As a part of these activities, on Children’s Day, May 5, 2012, “The 2<sup>nd</sup> Tohoku Children’s Summit ~ A town that everybody can love” was held in Tokyo with the participation of 265 children and adults.



### **Child-Led Club members speak out**

The first half of the summit (Section I) began with activity reports from members of the Child-Led Clubs in the three regions of Rikuzentakata City and Yamada-machi in Iwate Prefecture, and Ishinomaki City in Miyagi Prefecture. After a progress report on the reconstruction plan from the government, individual reports were presented on activities undertaken toward the realization of the “Dream Town Plan” prepared last year.

### **[Yamada-machi, Iwate Prefecture: A town full of love ~ Future and traditions]**

This was a presentation of pictures on a folding screen drawn by members of the club. The pictures depict the traditional festivals of the town and were examined in order to think about community building in the future.

**[Rikuzentakata City, Iwate Prefecture: Not only a town to live; A town to live in affluence]**

This was a presentation about the “Akari-no-Ki (tree of lights),” a symbolic tree where everyone can gather. It is to be established in the communication space of a temporary shopping street. Many participants took photos of the presentation when it was lit up.

**[Ishinomaki City, Miyagi Prefecture: A Rock ‘n’ Roll town where adults and children can live in comfort together with old and new things]**

This was a presentation about the “Children’s Center” scheduled to be completed next year. Members performed this presentation with all their might along with rock ‘n’ roll music. The speakers had a desire to enrich the local economy and contribute to reconstruction, even a little bit, by utilizing the Children’s Center. With this desire in mind, they talked about what they had specifically asked for in the design of the center and about the “Next-Generation Field” that will be a major selling point of the center.

Furthermore, the members of the three regions talked about the statement that they had submitted to Iwate and Miyagi prefectures and to the Reconstruction Agency. Their thoughts about the creation of the Future Newspaper and its distribution were also shared. In the presence of Mr. Hirano, the Reconstruction Minister who participated in this event, they also spoke that “the minister said he would create opportunities for children to speak out, so we are looking forward to when we can do that.”

**Children’s Conference**

At the same time as the activity reports were being presented in Section 1, the “Children’s Conference” was being held in a separate room. A total of 34 children participated in this conference; 12 members of the Child-Led Clubs and 22 children who participated in distributing the Future Newspaper.



Children from a total of 12 organizations in Iwate, Miyagi, Chiba, Saitama, Tokyo, Aichi, Osaka and Okinawa were divided into groups and introduced their activities to each other. After this, ideas were exchanged on the themes they would like to talk about with adults for the future of their towns and the future of Japan.

### **Children and adults speak out together**

The second half of the summit was the main event in which all child and adult participants could exchange their opinions. Themes that each individual wished to talk about were selected from the five themes that had been set based on the views of the participants in Section 1 and the Children's Conference. The participants were then divided into groups where children and adults exchanged their ideas with each other.



**~ Five themes ~**

- What is the future adults really want to create?
- How can we create occasions for children and adults to talk together?
- How can we increase the number of opportunities for children to directly share their opinions with adults?
- What do we need to let children express their opinions more freely?
- How can we come up with chances to be connected with various people?

**~ Comments from participating children ~**

- *When it is only children doing it, it is very interesting. I want to talk again to people about not only Tohoku but all prefectures with troubles. (Elementary school student)*
- *The people of Tohoku could exchange their ideas together with others and we could say a great many things that were on our minds, so it was possible to really understand each other. There were many adults who really listened hard to what we had to say. This made me really happy. (Junior high school student)*
- *I want to think within a much bigger framework. I also want to listen to even more opinions and stories of various regions. (High school student)*
- *When we presented our ideas, there were a lot of adults who looked at us and listened with great sincerity. (Member of the Child-Led Club / Junior high school student)*

- *After talking with many people in various positions, I got a deep impression of “we can surely do more of this kind of thing.” (Member of the Child-Led Club / High school student)*

**~ Comments from participating adults ~**

- *The children have such wonderful ideas. This summit reconfirmed for me that if we only have a place that allows children to share their ideas, the children will be able to achieve a great deal. (College student)*
- *I felt for myself directly that children want to do something on their own. It is very important that adults just support them. (Education official)*
- *I would like to create mechanisms (society and community) in which children can think about their future as their own thing and be involved. (Government official)*
- *I really felt that even though children have many things they would like to say and would like to be heard, adults are not prepared to listen to them. (Member of the general public)*
- *The experience of children being able to feel that they can change and create society and towns on their own is the real “life skill.” It is very important to change the consciousness of adults. (Member of the general public)*
- *It is not possible to have a society with no participation from children. (Member of the general public)*