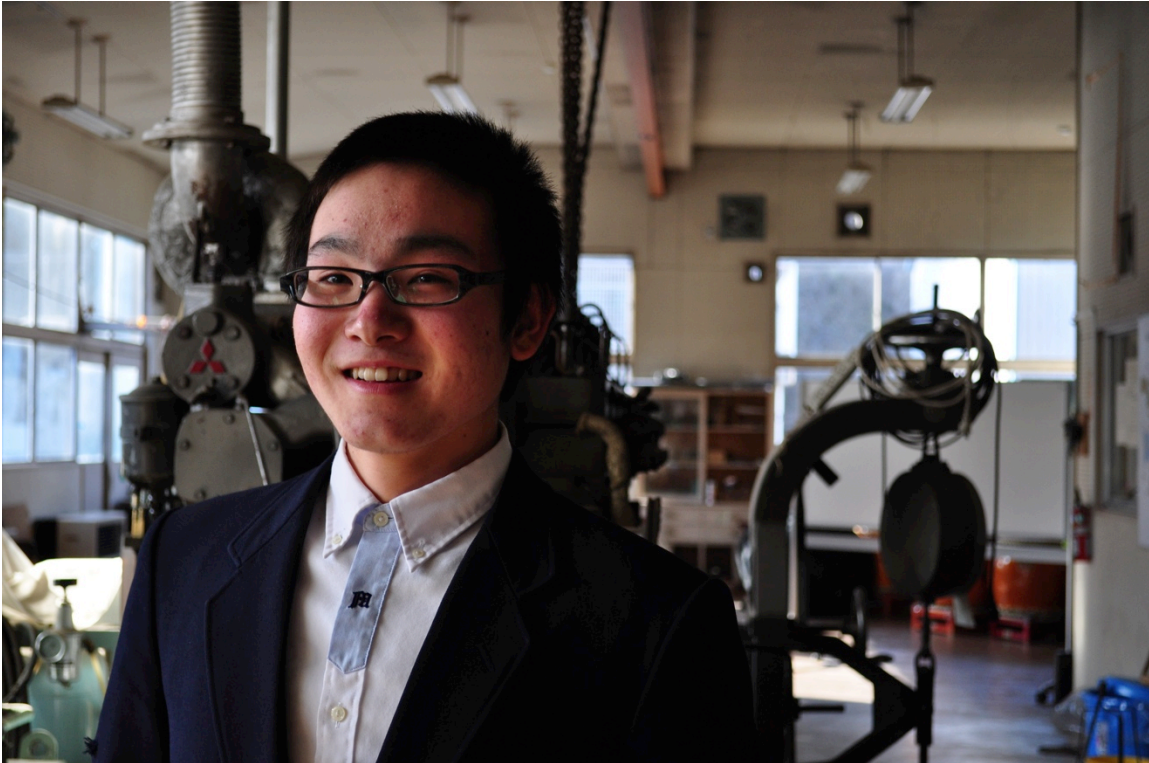


Hiroe's story: overcoming a fear of the sea

“I’ve lived by the sea since I was young, I grew up by the sea. I still love the sea, but I’m a little bit afraid now. I used to go fishing, but today I can’t anymore.”



When Masahiro “Hiroe” Fukushi, 17, talks about the day earthquake and tsunami hit, he calls it “That Day.” No other day like it came before, and none has come since. Today, almost one year later, Hiroe thinks back to “That Day” and remembers the indescribable stress of not knowing whether his family and friends were alright – or even alive – and the journey he had to take to get back home and find out.

“That Day I was on a school [boating] trip in Hawaii – I wasn’t in Japan. My older brother was in Miyagi for a university exam, but the rest of the family was here in Miyako. On the way back to Japan, there was an announcement in the boat about the earthquake. I was shocked, was completely stunned. I tried to make a phone call but I couldn’t reach my family.”

It was five days before Hiroe could speak to his parents.

When Hiroe finally made it home, he quickly realized the home he had travelled so far to reach, had now been destroyed. His family was no longer there, having been forced to abandon their home to avoid being swept away by the powerful wave of the tsunami.

“During the earthquake there was a fire and when I finally got back, I saw that everything was burnt and destroyed. My family had been evacuated to my relatives’ home in Yamada.” [Note: Yamada is a neighbouring town 25km south of Miyako].

The family has lost everything – not just their home, but their entire business. Before the tsunami struck their town, Hiroe’s family was one of hundreds in their town to make their living off of the sea, running a fish-drying factory in town.



Although he and his family lost so much on That Day, Hiroe has not lost his hope for the future – or for the fishery industry so vital to his family’s wellbeing and that of his hometown. “I’d like to be an engineer on a fishery boat. I don’t know yet for sure, I’m still young – but I know I’d like to contribute to the fishery industry somehow.”

Hiroe admits that this won’t be easy, after seeing with his own eyes how much damage the sea wreaked on the industry and his own family’s business last March, on That Day. “I still love the sea, but I’m a little bit afraid now,” he confesses. “I used to go fishing, but today I can’t anymore. I don’t want to.”

Save the Children is supporting Hiroe and other children in the Iwate area, to continue their studies and vocational training as they work towards careers in the fishery industry, one of the hardest hit by the tsunami that struck the north-eastern coast of Japan last March.

Hiroe is keen to continue his studies so he can overcome his fears of the sea, and contribute to the industry when he gets older. “The scholarship programme is really important for me because I’d like to continue my studies in junior college, and this scholarship would help me do that.”



Despite his lingering fear of the sea, one of the reasons the fishery industry is so important to Hiroe, he says, is that it helps him “to be connected with the people.” He is quiet as he thinks about his community’s ties to each other and to the sea, considering his role in it all. “I’ve lived by the sea since I was young, I grew up by the sea...I’d like to keep this strong tie to the people.”

PHOTOS

Page 1: Hiroe Fukushi, 17, poses for a shot at one of the “practical work” rooms in his school, the Miyako Fishery School, where Save the Children is supporting children to continue their studies and vocational training by providing scholarships to those whose families lost their incomes in the earthquake and tsunami.

Page 2: Fish drying on the rack on the roof of Miyako Fishery School, where Hiroe is studying for a career in the fishery industry. Before the earthquake and tsunami, Hiroe’s parents ran a fish-drying factory in Miyako – but the disaster destroyed their home and factory.

Page 3: Hiroe is determined to overcome his fear of the sea, and would like to continue working in the fishery industry as an engineer on a boat.

Photos: Annie Bodmer-Roy / Save the Children