

**Achieve Your Dream Project: “Genki Message” from the Children of Tohoku
(January 21, 2013)**

New Year’s Traditional Arts Performance: “I want to perform more in Tokyo!”

In cooperation with Sony Enterprises Co., Ltd. (Sony Building), the Achieve Your Dream Project invited children who strive daily to continue the legacy of traditional performing arts from Tohoku, to give a performance in Ginza, Tokyo over the New Year’s holidays. The Sony Group has been supporting us since last year through their charity programme "Ai-no-Izumi (Fountain of Love)."

This time three groups were supported by the Achieve Your Dream Project: the Isokusa Society for the Preservation of Toramai (Tiger Dance) (Kesenuma City, Miyagi Prefecture), the Japanese Dance Fukushima Satonoko-kai Association (Fukushima City, Fukushima Prefecture) and the Shinchi-machi Children’s Yosakoi Club (Shinchi-machi, Fukushima Prefecture). They performed traditional arts twice a day for two days on January 5 and 6, 2013, in the outdoor event space of the Ginza Sony Building. They carried a new spring wind with them through their vibrant and glamorous traditional arts performances. In addition to this opportunity of performing in Tokyo, the children also held interviews with newspapers and TV stations. On stage, it seemed that they gained pride and confidence in performing the traditional arts they have been working on for so long.

■ Isokusa Society for the Preservation of Toramai (Tiger Dance) (Kesenuma City, Miyagi

Prefecture): I want to energize everyone in my community and ease their pain through the sound of drums



“Isokusa Toramai” is a traditional tiger dance performed to drums that has been passed down through the ages in the Isokusa district of Oshima in Kesenuma City, Miyagi Prefecture. In 2011, the society was to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the revival of this dance that boasts a history of over 100 years. However, on March 11, the tsunami swept away the whole Isokusa-kaikan building where the society practiced and stored their drums, *happi* coats and tiger costumes. Oshima is a remote island of 3,200 residents in Kesenuma Bay where the main industries are coastal fishing and tourism. The reconstruction process since the earthquake may not have progressed as smoothly as residents would have liked, but the Isokusa Society believe that the revival of cultures rooted in their community is what can reenergize local people, and also act as a memorial to those who lost their lives in the tsunami. They have continued their activities with a basic rule of full participation by all Isokusa people, though their particularly focus is on the development and teaching of children. The Achieve Your Dream Project supported the society through the purchase of drums.

Here 13 children from elementary school to high school age performed the tiger dance. After coming down from the stage, Shunsuke Onodera (4th grader) said, "I am glad to be able to perform in a place such as Tokyo which I could rarely visit otherwise. I was nervous at first, but toward the end I could have fun. I want to perform more!"

Brimming with pride and a sense of fulfillment in performing their local traditional arts, he remarked, "I want to perform again in Tokyo. I will continue with the tiger dance and will play the role of a tiger when I become a high school student."



Since ancient times it has been said of the tiger that he "goes a thousand miles (health) and comes a thousand miles back (longevity)." Thus, tigers are seen as a good luck charm.



On very short notice, Mr. Itsunori Onodera, the Minister of Defense who was born in Kesenuma, came to support the society on the morning of the performance.



Members of the society said, "The earthquake may have swept our tiger costumes and drums a thousand miles away, but we certainly see the true value of the tiger dance here in this revival."

■ **Japanese Dance Satonoko-kai Association (Fukushima City, Fukushima Prefecture): In**

Fukushima which still suffers from radiation damage, children are living and hoping for a bright future



“Fukushima Satonoko-kai” was established in 2005 by children who wanted to continue practicing Japanese dance after completing their “Traditional Culture Lessons for Children.” The lessons had been given as part of a project commissioned by the Agency for Cultural Affairs. Currently, the association has 30 members from 3rd graders in elementary school to 2nd graders at high school, who enjoy learning Japanese dance under the guidance of Ms. Sariju Hanayagi. At the 19th National Convention of Folk Songs and Dance held in Sendai in February 2011, just before the earthquake, “Fukushima Satonoko-kai” won first prize in the general section of the Minister of Education Award. The Achieve Your Dream Project have supported the group on an expedition camp in Okayama and to perform their dances at local festivals, elderly people’s clubs and at other institutions.

Representing the 13 participants, Mizuki Yoshida (1st grader in high school) said, “Except for the high radiation doses (in the places where we live), we now have an ordinary high school life again. I think Fukushima has become strong after the earthquake.” She added firmly, “After the earthquake, I came to value my life more. I can feel the importance of things that I used to take for granted and appreciate more

the warmth of people." She looked relieved after finishing the performance, saying, "I have performed several times on stage for an audience sitting down in their seats. But I got nervous this time because it was the first time we have performed in front of people walking by."



Various brilliant dances with music from Japanese zither to folk songs and J-pop!



Mothers help their children to put on their kimonos, dress their hair and apply makeup. Most of their hair ornaments are handmade by their parents.



Satonoko-kai was the only organization among the participating groups to consist solely of female members (13 girls). Their glamorous and elegant dances brought passersby to a standstill to watch them.

■ **Shinchi-machi Children's Yosakoi Club (Shinchi-machi, Fukushima Prefecture):**

Rather than merely receiving support, we want to energize our community by ourselves to create a new tradition



The Shinchi-machi Children's Yosakoi Club is a dance club established in 2012 largely by students of Shoei Junior High School in Shinchi-machi, Fukushima Prefecture. They aim to energize their community through their own vigorous efforts. After the earthquake, vacant lots and grounds in the town were used to provide temporary housing. Spaces for children's activities became restricted, even more so due to the influence of heightened radiation levels. Under these circumstances, the students decided to establish the Yosakoi Club in order to energize their community themselves rather than waiting for support. They want to create a new tradition to be passed onto future generations. The Achieve Your Dream Project supported the club by manufacturing *happi* coats, having received fabric from a manufacturing factory of *koinobori* (carp streamers) located in Okayama Prefecture. Last year the club teamed up with the Nebuta-matsuri Festival in Aomori Prefecture to perform their dancing. Mr. Haneda, a representative of the club says that they could grow and become a club loved not only by the participating children, but also by people in their community. This time, 10 members in total performed Yosakoi. They danced in harmony but with power as if to keep out the cold. After their performance, Seiya Hayashi, president of the school student council (3rd grader at junior high school) presented the following message from the stage to the audience. "If there had been no nuclear

plant accident but just an earthquake, Shinchi might have already recovered from the day after the earthquake. [Concerning the impact of radioactivity] we get various information but I want to ask people to have their own viewpoint and to make a judgment for themselves." Many adults in the audience nodded in agreement with this comment.

After coming off stage he admitted, "I was nervous and my legs were knocking on the first day, but I was happy to see people coming."



The audience was overwhelmed by Yosakoi's speed and uplifting impact. People naturally chimed in with the chorus "Yokkoisho! Yokkoisho!"



A grand finish. We did it!



Wearing *happi* coats made from *koinobori* (carp streamer) fabric arranged through the support of the Achieve Your Dream Project.

The shows of these three organizations were traditional performances that can be enjoyed in Japan over the New Year's holidays. Their performances attracted crowds before they even started their shows, and once they started even more people walking through Ginza stopped to watch them. They delivered a powerful "Genki Message" to tell the audience that they had overcome difficulties since the earthquake, and that they are doing fine. They wished to convey their gratitude for the support they have received, and to put on an event at an impressive place where the audience could become energized and excited.

"I feel that this was a precious opportunity that the earthquake had brought, allowing us to gain support through the Achieve Your Dream Project," said Mr. Onodera, representative of Isokusa Toramai Society. "Like this time, even though they get nervous, we can see that children grow by having the opportunity to demonstrate their performances in the middle of Ginza, Tokyo."

We hope that there will be more places and opportunities for you to perform in the future.

Thank you for your wonderful performances.