

A Visit to the "Yamagata Child Care Circle Land" The Fukushima Susumu Fund

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Fifteen groups are now developing their activities having received first-term grants from the [Fukushima Susumu Fund](#). The fund was launched in collaboration with Suntory, and is one of a number of Eastern Japan reconstruction assistance projects. One of the objectives of the Fukushima Susumu Fund is to assist those who have been displaced outside of Fukushima Prefecture. We visited the [NPO "Yamagata Child Care Circle Land,"](#) one of the organizations that supports these displaced families,



The office of "Yamagata Child Care Circle Land" in Yamagata City

Excluding the three prefectures most directly affected by the earthquake (Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima), Yamagata Prefecture has been accepting the largest number of evacuees in Japan. Currently, about 10,000 people are displaced in the prefecture and 3,822 of them are concentrated in Yamagata City (as of Feb. 7, 2013). Yamagata Child Care Circle Land, which has supported community-based child-raising for over 10 years, realized that child-raising support for evacuated families as well as mental care for mothers was urgently required. Ms. Hiromi Noguchi, a representative of the organization says, "We did not do anything

special because the earthquake had occurred. We just did ordinary things that we also would do in our daily child-raising support.”

After the earthquake, the organization created a child-raising salon for the families evacuated from Fukushima to Yamagata City, in order to help mothers interact and exchange information among themselves. The salon welcomed as many as 200 participants on busy days. Although they already had experience in child-raising support, they still had to go through a process of trial and error to get it right. They worked with only limited personnel to assist families who could be evacuated for as long as two years, and whose evacuation period kept getting prolonged. Currently, a grant from the Fukushima Susumu Fund is utilized to fund the organization’s activities, especially running the salons where mothers can get together. In Yamagata City, “Fukushima Square” opened as a salon where evacuated families from Fukushima and local mothers can meet with each other. It is a rented private house with spacious rooms, and mothers with their small children are freely using the space. A kotatsu has been placed in a tatami room, and a play space for children has been located where their mothers can watch over them. It is a place that makes you feel at home and lets mothers interact with other mums freely while their children are playing in a safe environment.



The entrance to "Fukuyama Square" makes you feel right at home



We visited the salon on Valentine's Day. In the kitchen, mothers were happily making chocolate together.



Various playing equipment is placed in a sunny room, creating a safe playing space for children.

In addition, the NPO offers consultations of about two hours to mothers who may require further consideration. Evacuation places extra burdens on some families, especially mother-child only families, such as mother's experiencing anxiety over raising their children, a sense of economic burden and a tendency to be isolated. It is important for us to notice these distress signals from mothers. The Yamagata Child Care Circle Land is taking up the challenge and offering both "hard" and "soft" support, such as creating a place for people to be with others and to provide them with mental care. Ms. Noguchi explained their future goal: "It will be ideal if we can realize the independence of evacuated mothers, but at first, we want to accept them as they are and give them our consideration."

By assisting Yamagata Child Care Circle Land, the Fukushima Susumu Fund is making a contribution to the child-raising families evacuated from Fukushima Prefecture.

Click [here](#) to access the website of NPO Yamagata Child Care Circle Land (Japanese).