

TWO YEARS PAST: MIYAGI REMEMBERS

Category: Psycho-Social Care/Reconstruction/Volunteer Dispatch/Community Building

BE A PART OF THE PROJECT: PARTNER WITH JEN AND CONTRIBUTE

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Psycho-Social Care



Above: Members of the community gather at the Fuseiji Buddhist Temple, releasing prayers to the sky in remembrance of two-years since the Great East Japan Earthquake.

Balloons to the Heavens

March 8th marked the two-year anniversary since the Great East Japan Earthquake. Across the region, memorial ceremonies were held acknowledging all those lost from the disaster. In the Kama district (west end), Fuseiji temple hosted a “prayer balloon” service, where prayers were tied to the balloons and then released into the sky at 2:46pm, the same time the earthquake hit. Those who gathered said their prayers as they watched the balloons rise towards the clouds. Many said they felt reunited with their late loved ones. JEN has been supporting the Kama district over the past two years, initially serving hot meals and holding a community café during the emergency response phase. The Kami district, led by the Kami-Kama Recovery Council now faces the dilemma of how to redistribute their land. In assistance, JEN hosted workshops to facilitate discussion among local leadership during the planning process. As the community withstands this transitional phase, we remember the departed and each loss from the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami.

Reconstruction

Plans for “Prayer” Memorial Park by 2021

Located at the northwest end of the mouth of the old-Kitakami River stands Hiyoriyama hill. This vantage point became famous after the tsunami, as one was able to see the entire districts of Kadowakicho and Minamihamacho flattened in the tsunami’s aftermath. There has been debate about whether to preserve some of these disaster-stricken buildings as memorial sites, or rather demolish them and start a new. Former Kadonowaki and Ookawa elementary schools sit where Ishinomaki City and Miyagi Prefecture have plans to build a national memorial park, or “Prayer Park”. Whether or not the buildings stay is up for debate, however the city will rebuild the park with citizen-led construction. JEN will be assisting in the construction of the park and we have already worked with local youth in assembling flowerbeds last fall. This received positive responses, with people expressing interest in continuing their involvement in the reconstruction of their city. JEN will contribute in any way possible in the recovery effort, and look forward to the day when the park becomes a home for remembrance and center of life in Ishinomaki.

Below: Miniature model displays plans for a “prayer park” to be constructed in the Kadowakicho and Minamihamacho districts.



COUNTRY: Ishinomaki, JAPAN

Volunteer Dispatch

Centuries Old Festival Returns

On March 17th, a several-hundred year old shrine festival, dating before the Edo period, took place in Kitsunezakahama of the Oshika Peninsula. The area now only comprises a mere thirty households for a total of about ninety residents. The festival faces difficulties upholding their age-old tradition, worried about how it will be passed down to the next generation as the population declines and ages. Carrying the *mikoshi*, ornate palanquin-like portable shrine, requires a number of abled-bodied people. This year, JEN was able to assist by sending volunteers to organize the event, and carry the *mikoshi* around the city.

Villagers and a total of twenty-two volunteers, including those of the Mitsui & CO. LTD, wore traditional *kimono* and marched around the shoreline shouting “*Chosai! Chosai!*” meaning “today is the day of the festival.” Excitement roared through the city in honor of the believed ghost/spirit occupying the Shinto Shrine purifying the city. Over a hundred more people attended the festival this year than last, almost surpassing the number who used to attend before the earthquake. Locals were excited to see such a strong turnout, giving them great pleasure in seeing so many people in their town once again. JEN has worked in Kitsunezakahama since the early stages of the disaster relief, and will continue to support the community throughout its reconstruction in hopes of seeing the smiles we so saw during this month’s festival.

Below: Volunteers and members of the Kitsunezakahama community carry traditional mikoshi throughout the town.



Recognizing the Needs in the Field

Meeting the needs in an appropriate manner is very crucial when assistance programs are implemented. Thus, programs must be designed carefully based on prudent assessments and be flexibly revised according to the altering situations (Project Management Policy)

Community Building



Above: Community commemorates the completed construction of a new shrine had previously been destroyed in the earthquake and tsunami.

Upkeeping Tradition: Finding Peace

In May 2011, shortly after the Great East Japan Earthquake, JEN teams dispatched to restore the Watanoha-Myoujinsha shrine where volunteers cleared rubble and raised fallen graves. Nearly two years later, the Ishinomaki shrine has been renewed and a ceremony was held to unveil the new shrine building. JEN staff were invited and introduced during the ceremony to the community. The chief priest thanked JEN for its service and hard work put into restoring the shrine. More than forty parishioners came for the event, filling the entire space and then some. At the end of the ceremony, a young man approached one of our staff members telling him that, “My father lies at rest in this cemetery, I’m very grateful to you and the rest of your team for your tireless work.”

JEN is committed to continuing our efforts in Tōhoku. It gives us positive reassurance knowing that the affected are finding comfort through our projects. Please continue to support us in our Miyagi recovery endeavors.

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