



Asubito Fukushima (General Incorporated Association)
Eiju Hangai, Representative Director



As the Representative Director, I was a board member of Japan's largest power utility, Tokyo Electric Power Co. (Tepco) until June 2010, just nine months before the earthquake and tsunami disaster that struck Japan's Fukushima region in March 2011, and I feel deep regret that the nuclear accident occurred. I was born in Minamisoma City in Fukushima Prefecture and for some time starting right after the accident I volunteered to deliver relief supplies from Tokyo. Besides the disaster, Minamisoma was also suffering from rumors and misinformation related to the accident. A woman where I delivered relief supplies said to me, "Don't just provide material assistance. Please organize something for our local children." And that is how my real mission in life was born—to create an organization to develop the talents and abilities of the people who will take on the long-term challenge of rebuilding Fukushima.

Six years have passed since the devastating earthquake, tsunami and nuclear accident. Some of the areas affected by the nuclear accident still have no timeline for residents to return home. Decontamination has progressed in some municipalities that had been designated as evacuation zones after the nuclear accident, and the evacuation orders have been lifted in a growing number of nearby towns. But that doesn't solve everything. Now that six years have elapsed, many former residents are choosing not to return even where evacuation orders have been lifted, especially where families with children have settled into new lives where they evacuated. As a result, some areas are facing a dramatic increase in the average age of the population. Fukushima has many workers in primary industries like farming and fishing, so besides this rapid aging of the community, negative consumer attitudes about the radiation no one can see are hurting demand for Fukushima produce and products. The road to Fukushima's recovery will take a long time.

In this environment, we believe strongly in the potential of the primary, middle, and high school children of Fukushima. They have experienced the disaster and nuclear accident, and they have survived. Many young people appreciate the assistance Fukushima received from all over Japan, are troubled by others' misconceptions about their region, want to contribute to the future of Fukushima, and want to do something to serve others. The disaster in Fukushima has exposed some of the real problems of society today. Asubito Fukushima is offering age-specific programs to develop the resources and the capacity of the younger generation to rebuild our region. Asubito is coined from "asu" (tomorrow) and "hito" (people) in Japanese, and means "the people who will create tomorrow."

Age-specific capacity building

(1) Hands-on learning for primary and middle school children

As a platform to support the development of primary and middle school children, we are operating the Minamisoma Solar Agripark in Minamisoma City. It includes a 500-kilowatt solar power plant and two dome-shaped “plant factories” (indoor hydroponics). Children can conduct inspections of a real solar plant and have the experience of researching solar and electricity generation. They can change the angle and direction of the solar panels, and directly experience hydropower generation by comparing their own power with that of water. This all gives them various learning opportunities on the theme of renewable energy.

With hands-on learning, what we emphasize is the children’s own capacity to think and take action. Rather than giving them answers, we have designed the hands-on program so that they develop their own hypotheses, and search for and discover their own answers through trial and error. We also aim to build the children’s the ability to present their own ideas. Based on their own internalized experiences, we believe they will be able to think for themselves and present their ideas with confidence. We also expect that they will naturally move from presenting their ideas to taking action. Now four years since the program began, 80% of the primary and middle school students in the city have experienced this hands-on learning as part of their school classes, and the circle is expanding to all parts of the prefecture.





(2) Asubito Juku (Social Entrepreneur School) for High School Students

Since May 2014, we have been holding the Asubito Juku (Social Entrepreneur School) for High School Students in Fukushima City once a month for the prefecture's high school students who are interested in social issues. I facilitate the sessions together with Junko Edahiro, environmental journalist and professor at Tokyo City University. Students clarify their own personal visions and use this as a place to develop specific steps to achieve their missions and become social entrepreneurs. About 30 high school students motivated to take on the big social issues in the reconstruction of Fukushima are registered in the program. About ten of them gather every month and are very focused from 10 a.m. until the evening each time.

At the school they learn about missions and how to achieve them. They learn that a mission is something a person wants to accomplish that also creates value for society. And in the process, they may fail seven times, but they have the ability to persist and try eight times. They learn extensively through case studies about the importance of separating their purpose and their means. Students who have taken the program have said in their own words, "I can survive many setbacks in my means, but I will not stray from my mission." Their words show that if while still young they can learn to think and act with a clear distinction between their purpose and their means, they will not forget this even as adults.



(3) Student-run magazine “Fukushima Taberu Tsushin” (Eating Fukushima)

At the Asubito Juku (Social Entrepreneur School) we encourage high school students to create projects to tackle social issues. The first project to emerge was the “Messages from High School Students: Fukushima Taberu Tsushin” (Eating Fukushima Magazine). In 2014 a student in her second year of high school declared her personal mission. She said, “It pains me that the Fukushima I love is so misunderstood. I would like to help restore confidence in Fukushima, particularly in agriculture.” Concrete discussions continued with like-minded juniors at the social entrepreneur school, resulting in the launch of this magazine. It has been published every three months, and as of April 2017, nine issues have been released since the inaugural issue in April 2015. The magazine features food items prepared by the producers, and despite the price of 2500 yen (about US\$23) per issue, it has 760 subscribers, from Hokkaido in Japan’s north to Okinawa in the south.

Asubito Fukushima provides the secretariat to publish the magazine. Staff members accompany members of the student editorial team on interviews and check their drafts. Through all of this the students are transforming their hardships into a source of inspiration, and with each issue published they are increasing their interviewing skills and quality of manuscripts. This initiative is helping to restore confidence in Fukushima’s agriculture industry while also building the capacity of high school students.

The student editorial team is already in its third generation and has grown into a social enterprise in Fukushima, having grown beyond its high school roots. The cycle of passing on knowledge from seniors to juniors has been repeated, and Asubito Fukushima continues to support the initiative so that high school students can develop themselves into capable individuals for the rebuilding of Fukushima.



Age-specific capacity building

Fostering role models

Since last year the first high school students to graduate from the Asubito Juku social entrepreneur school are now becoming university students. We have continued with an Asubito Juku for Fukushima-born university students who are now studying mainly in Tokyo. We are working together with them to create new social enterprises that will benefit Fukushima.

Envisioning the future we are confident that this kind of capacity building will produce outstanding Fukushima-style social entrepreneurs who can create their own social enterprises for Fukushima. Other young people will be attracted by their examples and make an effort to emulate them. We are sure that this chain reaction will become a driving force to produce the future human resources of Fukushima.

Rebuilding Fukushima, envisioning the future of the region

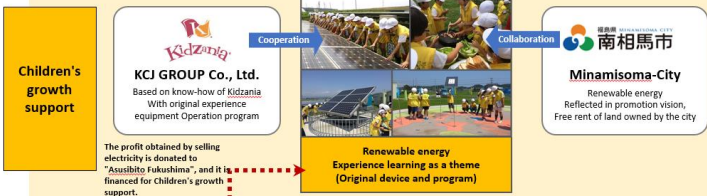
Until now people in rural areas were resigned to accept the loss of workers to the major urban centers, but felt the government would eventually attract factories to set up here. There was even a sense of self-deprecation, that there was nothing attractive in rural areas to stop the loss of human resources. But the disaster has somehow created a strong local attachment and local pride among the young people of Fukushima. Asubito Fukushima is not by any means trying to keep young people from leaving. Rather, by working together with these high school and university students to create startup projects and businesses to rebuild Fukushima, we are creating a positive cycle. It gives young people a new sense of purpose in their own lives to tackle the reconstruction of the land of Fukushima. The capacity building of people who will rebuild Fukushima will also lead to a new vision for the future of the region.



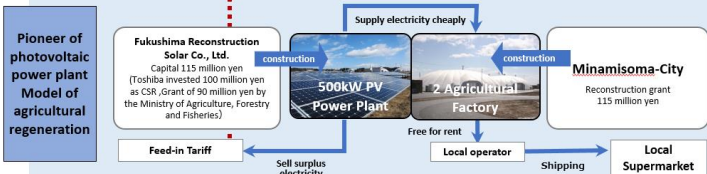
As a base for children's growth support. As a symbol of regional reconstruction.

Using the site of 2.4 hectares where the city acquired the tsunami agricultural land from the landowners and utilized the city's property, the stage of experiential learning for children with photovoltaic power generation and a plant factory was "Minamisoma Solar Agri Park". It was completed in March 2013, the second year after the disaster, thanks to promotion promoted by Minamisoma City and the public and private sectors. Experience learning of renewable energy currently being conducted at the park is utilized at the time of comprehensive learning of elementary and junior high schools in Minamisoma city and on the weekend it is held at the open school in collaboration with universities etc. to make children It is a place to learn from us. Also, from the perspective of natural energy and agriculture, we have visited many people as a symbol of reconstruction in the disaster area.

Children's growth support by our "Hand-on learning"



Minamisoma Solar Agri Park (2.4ha, completed in March 2013)



Hands-on learning

As part of elementary and junior high school classes in Minamisoma city, etc., the experience Hands-on learning at the park exceeds 3,000, 90% of elementary and junior high school students in the city

Tour of Park

As a symbol of reconstruction, as a case study of cooperation between natural energy and agriculture, as a case study of a new business, more than 16,000 people have visited since March 2013.

Company employee training

We accept employee training of companies based in this Park based on the whole area of Minami Soma for a fee and are devoted to the management expenses of developing human resources for children.



New Center House (Completion in October 2016)



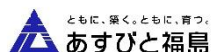
The temporary center house which has accepted many children and visitors so far has been reborn as an exchange base for wider use by local residents since October 2016. In addition to two comfortable training rooms, it has a kitchen where you can eat the famous solar sandwiches, a IRORI salon and a staircase lounge.



What is the "solar sandwich" ?

"Solar sandwich" with plenty of grilled fresh tomatoes cultivated at our affiliate, using sunlight electricity. It is a specialty that can only be eaten here!
(Reservation system - 1000 yen)

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