

Support from Singapore for the Great East Japan Earthquake

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On the wake of the Great East Japan Earthquake, Singapore came in a truly impressive way to support the devastated areas. Among countless expression of compassion is the donation from the people of Singapore, through Singapore Red Cross, to build four centers in the devastated areas. Three centers are already in operation and the fourth center is scheduled to be opened in 2014.

In December 2013, I visited two of these centers, one in Miyagi and another in Iwate prefecture. Everyone I met was grateful to the generous donation from Singapore, and I could see firsthand that the centers are now serving the communities well in their path toward recovery.

Shichigahama Toyama Nursery School: “Lion Park”

Shichigahama, Miyagi prefecture, is situated about 20 km from Sendai city, facing the Pacific Ocean.

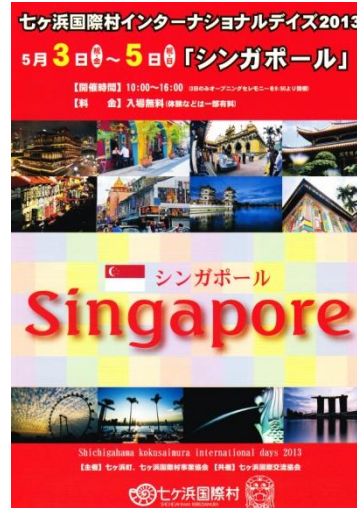
Due to damage incurred in the earthquake, Toyama Nursery School was forced to close for two years. By generous support from Singapore, the school was reopened in May 2013. The town of Shichigahama has put out a public appeal for a name that would represent the school's deep bonds with Singapore and the name “Lion Park” was selected to become the new nickname of the school. Senior Parliamentary Secretary for Foreign Affairs and Culture, Community and Youth Mr Sam Tan and Ambassador of Singapore in Japan Mr Chin Siat Yoon attended the opening ceremony and had lunch together with the children. In conjunction with the completion of the Shichigahama Toyama Nursery School, Singapore was featured at the annual local festival, the Shichigahama Kokusaimura International Days.

When I visited the center, the children were finishing afternoon sandwich and milk hour and greeted me with songs. At present, about forty children from six month to five years old are at the school. All of them were cheerful and beautiful. I also met a group of high school volunteers from Hyogo prefecture who were assisting the staff of the school. They made a bus journey of 12 hours from their hometown in Hyogo to reach Shichigahama.

It was a cold day, but I left the Lion Park with the warm heart.



(Toyama Nursery School)



(Shichigahama Kokusaimura International Days)



(With the Principal of Toyama Nursery School)

Taro Support Center

Taro Support Center is in Miyako City, in the coastal area of Iwate prefecture. After the earthquake, the Center was opened in November 2011 so as to support those who have lost their home by the disaster and are living in the temporary accommodations. Some forty people, mainly elderly, are visiting the Center per day, participating in various activities. The Center is also providing assistance, through individual visits, to the

elderly people who live in the temporary housing and are not able to come to the Center. When I visited the Center, there were groups of people enjoying chatting, making origami and exercising. The neatly done building, on its façade, has a red stripe which symbolizes Singapore. At the entrance of the building, you can see the plaque which recognizes the generous support from Singapore Red Cross, and on the wall of the main function room, you can see the picture of Merlion, Bay Sands Area and other landmarks of Singapore. The staff of the Center also informed me that a group of volunteers from the Presbyterian Church of Singapore was due to visit the Center. Yet another example which demonstrates that the generous support from the people of Singapore continues and that the new bonds between the two countries continue to be forged.



(Taro Support Center)



(Plaque at the entrance)



(With the Director of Taro Support Center)

I appreciate all of the help given during this visit by the people working for Toyama Nursery School, Taro Support Center, Miyagi prefecture, Shichigahama town, Iwate prefecture, and Miyako city. I was profoundly impressed by the stories which people told calmly but at the same time conveyed the disastrous scene after earthquake and their determination to the reconstruction of hometown. I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the people there, and the Singapore community which continues to support them.