

3 July 2012

Proposal

Ishinomaki City : THE Rolling Stones

The Rolling Stones: Now That's What We Call ROCK

Yamada Town: KYT (Keppare Yamada Toekomst)

Go for it! YamadaToekomst (KYT)

Rikuzen Takata City Human Bonds - Save the Hope TAKATA

We are the Children's Community Building Clubs. We meet once a week in three areas - Ishinomaki City in Miyagi Prefecture, and Rikuzentakata City and Yamada Town in Iwate Prefecture. We discuss how we can make our communities better through the reconstruction of our communities.

In the future when we grow up, we will be supporting our own communities - therefore our aim is to build communities that are even more enjoyable and lively.

Right after the disaster last year, we received support from people all around the world. Some sent us stationary, stuffed animals, other necessary items and donations. Many people visited us, played with us, and also told us about different countries. We interacted with them a lot.

We were very happy to see that people from around the world were thinking about us, and we were also very encouraged. Thanks to your support we now live the life we have.

We really hope you do not forget us and also visit us again.

We have been discussing at the clubs how we can best help other people in the world, and are presenting our ideas here. Please hear our voices.

1. Please listen to children's opinions, in addition to listening to adults.

First of all, what we would like to share with you is "please listen to our opinions, hear our voices." Please do not decide by simply listening to adults - we are not asking you to simply listen to us. We would like our ideas and opinions to be treated equally just like those of adults.

We have reasons why we want our voices to be heard - and one of them is the experience we had during and after the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami last year.

Adults took the lead in the evacuation. We did not know what tsunamis were, and evacuated to higher points without knowing what was really happening. We were not aware of how panicked the

Speaking out from Tohoku

adults were, and what would happen later on. We are very grateful for the leadership taken by the adults. The adults had to deal with all the issues that were coming up and did not have time to listen to our opinions. Our opinions are of secondary importance. Children couldn't do anything. If we knew what they were thinking, we would have liked to help.

We would also like to know if you heard about one school that was severely affected by the tsunami. Right after the earthquake, the school's teachers evacuated children to the school yard, but they didn't guide the children to the small hill behind the school yard. Children whose parents came to pick them up were allowed to leave, while the teachers kept the remaining children in the cold school yard, watching what was happening to the river right next to the school. Some of the children pleaded with the teachers, "let's run up to the higher land." The teachers did not have time to respond to the plea, and as a result, many people including children lost their lives. Had the voices of children been heard, had they run up the hill, we might have had a different outcome.

There is another story we would like to share with you. At a kindergarten, teachers were divided at the onset of the earthquake - whether or not they should keep the children or hand them over to their parents. The kindergarten is located on a hill, so if they stayed where they were, they would be safe. There was a child who was crying for their parents. Some of the teachers decided they should take the child back home, and took the child in a bus to the coastal community where the tsunami warning had been issued. When the school bus was taking the child back to the parents the bus was engulfed by the tsunami. The children who remained on the hill survived. This was a case in which adults actually listened to children. Yes, we want our voices to be heard, but was it really appropriate to simply listen to a kindergarten child? It is important to make sure children are feeling safe. However, it is important to prioritize children's safety after listening to their opinions. You might have to factor in how elementary school pupils and kindergarten children think differently.

Please think thoroughly about what we have been presenting. Please do not make light of our opinions just because they are coming from children. Please think about what has been said rather than who is saying it.

By listening to and incorporating children's opinions, many children would actively think about their society. We would like our communities to be built based on our opinions and respecting our own communities. By exchanging ideas with people in the communities, we will be able to interact with the adults in the community and become closer to them.

Our communities become better through sharing opinions from both children and adults. If we can build better communities, we will like our communities better, and we will want to spend our lifetime in the same community, want to continue working in the same community, and take great care of the future of the community.

If we can combine the opinions and realities coming from adults and children - that are full of creativity - we can expand our possibilities and make our communities better. We strongly believe that with the active participation of adults and children in community building, we can make the future much more fulfilled!!

2. Please established child-centered disaster risk reduction programmes everywhere in the world

1) Please review and revise, when needed, disaster preparedness manuals for schools, parks and other building, globally.

Some of the evacuation routes posted at schools are not necessarily the shortest routes, and they sometimes do not mention how we can evacuate. Please make signs with evacuation routes and modes of evacuation clearly indicated. Please make sure there are evacuation drills based on these signs. We need more drills. We can designate certain time periods and make sure all community members are part of the drills.

Please make sure we are all on the same page when it comes to disasters. Adults may know, the elderly may know - but how they react in the real situation is different. If an adult fails to make a proper judgment, other adults and children around them are in danger. Some children died because a school principal did not make the right decision.

Please decide when we should evacuate. We heard about the case of an old person who was washed away by the wave as they did not think it was dangerous saying, "The wave did not come up that high at the time of an earthquake a few days ago." If there is criteria for evacuation - for example, in a level 3 earthquake, go up to the city hall building, and in a level 4 earthquake, evacuate to the top of the hill. If this is made clear, we will not have to see too many people being left behind when next disaster hits. If there are no clear criteria, it would be up to the adults or parents. These criteria would become an excellent reference point when deciding where to evacuate to.

2) Please make sure we can see our friends

Some of our friends had to move away from where they used to live. We feel sad not to be able to see our friends. We therefore would like opportunities to reunite with those friends during long school breaks. For example, it would be great if we could all go to large open spaces on a bus.

3) Please be prepared for disasters

We learned many things from the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami. We used blankets and curtains that are available at schools to keep us warm - it was a cold winter. Our school uniforms are not warm enough. We want to choose what we wear over our school uniforms. The overcoats specified by schools are not warm enough - we want them to be much warmer.

We did not have enough food items - all we had was a small amount of water. Public locations including schools should be prepared with stockpiles of emergency food, emergency grab bags, and blankets, heat pads or cool pads in order for us to respond to the temperature.

3. We propose the establishment of a system where children around the world can collaborate.

We would like to further develop friendly relationships with other children in the world. We would like to establish sharing opportunities like our Children's Community Building Clubs, and exchange opinions or visit each other. If we are able to communicate with children elsewhere in the world, we will be able to support each other in case of emergencies. Sometimes children feel reluctant to share their concerns with adults, but we feel comfortable sharing them with other children. We know from our experience: "We became scared because adults around us were panicking."; "We did not want temporary houses to be built on our school yard." There are things we can understand better because we are children.

We have heard that in some areas there has been an increase in child labour. In the areas where people lack access to many resources, some children may think, "I would rather study than work." We feel very strongly that there should be opportunities for children to talk to each other, so that we can protect and respect the voices of children that might otherwise be easily ignored. This is how we can make sure disaster preparedness and the building of communities and countries, will provide protection to children who are weaker than others.

Adults and children sometimes have different ideas, and by incorporating the opinions of both parties, we can make better ideas. Some of the adults who came to see our work at the Children's Community Building Clubs were very impressed by our ideas. We also want to provide our opinions.

Children and older people are very vulnerable. There are many children and elderly in the world who suffer from poverty and lack of food. We feel that if we speak out as children, or speak out on behalf of children who are in even more disadvantaged situations, we are able to protect them. This is how we can make this world more kind.

In order for us to achieve what we want to achieve, we feel that we need to create opportunities - such as the Children's Reconstruction Committee - where children can share their opinions at the policy level. We want to be active in other countries too, and hold a summit or conference where child representatives of other countries gather. If our voices are louder, our ideas can be shared widely and ultimately materialize into what we are thinking about. We would also like to have more adults from around the world who we trust and who will listen to our voices.

There are many children in the world who are not provided with the opportunities to speak out. We therefore think that it would be exciting and great for learning if we could create opportunities/spaces where children can exchange their opinions. Spaces where children can participate in politics with proper rights to speak out, and exchange opinions beyond borders on how children want to improve their countries and their communities. We would like to build a society in which children can enjoy an active life.

We believe that our ideas in this proposal, coming from the children of Miyagi, Iwate and Fukushima who experienced the disaster, will be very useful in disaster risk reduction and in recovery and reconstruction after disasters in the world, especially for other children. We look forward to seeing you again and to continue exchanging our ideas with you. Thank you very much.