

FUKUSHIMA DESK NEWS

Sendai Diocesan Support Center

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Towards Our Future Hope

"Listening" Volunteers' Symposium Starts

(The following is the opening address by Sister Kayoko Shibata, CND, Chairperson of "Sakura" Listening Volunteers' Group, on November 14, 2015)

For the past four years, I always started any opening address with a mention of East Japan Great Earthquake, regardless of the nature of the meeting, because my heart was always full of the memory of the disaster. However, I have made up my mind to stop doing that now. It is not that I want to forget the tragedy, but it is because I want to make a new start toward the future.



For example, three years have passed since we started a course to train listening volunteers. The seed grew, and a small shoot appeared. Yes, it is certainly growing. One of the results of the growth is this present symposium. Many of those present today must realize the meaning of its existence.

Your own growth changes society. When you stand close to someone, your relationship with your neighbor will bring about a change in yourself at the same time. Thus you start changing the society. You are all experiencing this, regardless of the scope of changes, and I would like to express my gratitude and respect to all of you who are members of the Volunteers' Group Sakura, for your generous participation in this activity. I am sure each one

of you also feels the joy and satisfaction of finding yourself changing as well as a sense of satisfaction.

I hope you will enjoy the rest of the time today, as you listen to the lecture by Mrs. Okayasu whose memory you have been cherishing. I am also looking forward to her talk, as well as the sharing of your valuable experiences.

History of the Listening Volunteers' Group "Sakura"

In 2012, the "Listening Volunteer Formation Course" was started in Sakura no Seibo Lifelong Education Center, with its first lecture by Mrs. Akiko Okayasu. It was in April, 2014, that requests started coming in from social welfare institutions to send them supporting arms from our Center. As time went on, we started giving the diploma for those who finished the course, and more applicants came, until we counted as many as 80 members in 2015. At present we regularly visit ten institutions, such as senior citizens' homes, temporary residences for the refugees of tsunami, and so on.



Three years have passed since the Listening Volunteers stated as an organized group. Now the members wish to stop and look at the steps they have taken, and improve their skills. This desire has led the to the Listening Volunteers' Symposium.

The panelists who kindly accepted to come and instruct were as follows:

Ms. Akiko Okayasu, the regular speaker at Listening Volunteers Formation.

Ms. Yoko Nachigami, representative of Aizu Little Breeze.

Ms. Tomoko Fujieda, administrator of Motouchi Group Home for Dememtia Patients.

Ms. Shigeko Ujiie, member of Listening Volunteers Sakura.

Ms. Nachigami said that listening by telephone alone works perfectly, and that this kind of new style answers the increasing need of counselling. Ms. Fujieda said facing a dementia patient needs special care, e.g. as if meeting



the person for the first time at each occasion. Her explanation using a power point was quite effective. Ms. Ujiie, who herself had lost a family member, was very much aware of the need of being listened to. When she realized how much she had been looking down on the clients, her own experience opened her eyes, she said. Ms. Okayasu stressed

the importance of treating clients with deep respect and being patient with the client until the latter arrives at the assertion of themselves.

In the beginning, the members of the volunteer listening were all eager to be helpful for others. Toward the end, they become aware of having been changed themselves. Not only the counsellors themselves but even the clients were felt to be precious. Even the fatigue after the counselling felt pleasant, they said.

(Sister Noriko Atami, CND, Listening Volunteer Sakura)

There is No Damage Caused by Rumor Where People Know Each Other Personally

According to the data given by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries on November 27, the population for agriculture and forestry has decreased 29 % compared with the census of the previous year, while the decrease of that of the entire country is only 19.8 %. The analysis by the Prefecture is the aging of farmers, the rumor of the nuclear accidents harming the rice, and having produced more rice than necessary, etc. This is really hard on Fukushima Prefecture. However, the Fukushima farmers will never lose their fighting spirit. Some of them have actually sold more rice this year than a year ago