

EIWAN News Vol. 4

Empowerment of Immigrant Women Affiliated Network

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Fukushima Forum "World Women's Café"

Discover the charms of Fukushima's multicultural community

Fukushima Forum "World Women's Café" was held on September 7 at the AOZ building near Fukushima station.

The aim was to provide a place where women from foreign countries (immigrant women) living in Fukushima can share information about everyday life, as well as personal problems and their thoughts about social issues, etc., not just among themselves but also with local Japanese residents, especially women, to help everyone in the community learn and understand ways to deal with various problems from the viewpoints of both human rights and gender equality.

Part I was a film show of *HAFU*, a documentary film about young people who were born between parents of different nationalities and are sometimes called "double blood" in Japan. Part II was "World Café & Talk," where participants, including immigrant women living in Fukushima and local Japanese residents, talked about different preset themes over homemade Chinese, Korean, Filipino, Thai and Japanese foods. Participants were separated into five groups, each with its own theme for discussion. The themes were: school, education, family, simple Japanese, and young generation.

We had a total of 150 participants for Part I and II. For Part I, many Japanese residents participated and left some interesting comments on the questionnaire sheets distributed after the film. Here are some examples of the comments: "I was moved when I learned about the situation and thoughts about the "double blood" people." "I felt that I should have tried harder to understand the "double blood" people." "Being in the same position and having children who are in the same situation as those in the film, it made me think even more deeply." "Schools and our society should try to show more acceptance."

For Part II, although we initially had planned every thing of 40 people maximum, we actually had more people participate. The immigrant women, mainly Chinese and Filipino, from not only Fukushima City but from Shirakawa, Sukagawa, Koriyama, and Iwaki, who had been involved in EIWAN activities, were truly looking forward to the Fukushima Forum and came all the way to AOZ to participate. The fact that we had more immigrant women participants than expected shows that the immigrant women were desperately looking for a place and opportunity to speak with people beyond differences in culture and nationally.

By talking with each over delicious foods cooked by immigrant women and student volunteers who started preparing the dishes from early morning, everyone was able to get to know each other quickly

and talk frankly. During the final talk session, where all five groups shared some details of their discussions, we were able to hear many positive opinions and ideas like the following: "I want to communicate with people as human beings beyond differences in skin color, language, and culture," "I want people to acknowledge immigrant women," "I want to know more about Japanese culture and customs."

As the Executive Director of EIWAN, I would like to thank every one of the 25 people who helped make Fukushima Forum a success. They are the nine immigrant women who were great contributors to the Fukushima Forum, the six volunteer leaders in the kitchen, the seven student volunteers from Sakurano Seibo Junior College, and the three interpreters. I also want to thank the people who helped set everything up and direct the entire event.

We will consider and examine the opinions received from the participants and cooperators for our future activities and events that will further promote multicultural cooperation.

Maeda Keiko, Executive Director of EIWAN

#### One big step toward building close and personal relationship

Living in Fukushima, I have noticed there are many festival-type international exchange events sponsored by organizations like Fukushima International Association, and lecture presentations by foreign speakers for promoting "international understanding." However, I do not think there were many workshop-type events operated by private organization where participants can speak freely with people from foreign countries. For this reason alone, I feel World Women's Café, which was Part II of Fukushima Forum, was a very new and meaningful attempt.

Considering our aim of "Providing a place where Japanese women and immigrant women can get to know and talk with each other as citizens living in the same community," I felt we could have done better at persuading more local Japanese women to join us in the event. However, as one of the few Japanese women, the experience of being on the minority side versus the majority made up of foreign women was an interesting.

Above all, the event was truly meaningful because it gave the immigrant women living in different parts of Fukushima an opportunity to meet and exchange words with each other. It was a big step toward building close and personal relationship among these foreign women. So, I am hoping that we will be able to continue providing similar kind of place and opportunity, though it might be smaller in size, where these women with different cultural backgrounds can talk casually to each other over a cup

of tea on a regular basis.

Mizushima Izumi, Operating Committee member

### Summer Refresh Program in Kyoto

The EIWAN Summer Refresh Program in Kyoto was held from August 19 to 23. We had 9 members (6 adults and 3 children) from Hawak Kamai ("Let's hold hands" in Filipino), a self-help group formed by Filipino immigrant women living in Fukushima, joined us in Kyoto.

While in Kyoto, the weather was wonderful and although it even became hot during the day, the children who went to Lake Biwa and the adults who stayed in Kyoto for sightseeing were all full of energy and had some great time away from the everyday routine in Fukushima.

The children went camping in Lake Biwa and enjoyed playing in the lake with children from Kyoto and children who had moved to Kyoto from Fukushima. As part of the program, we took some time to have some children from Fukushima talk about their experience of the 3.11 earthquake. The participants, including the university student volunteers, were able to understand and get a feel of what it was like on 3.11.

The adults group of Filipino women, who rarely get a chance to leave Fukushima to refresh themselves were joined by members of Kyoto YWCA - those who belong to Fukushima Project, those in charge of supporting foreigners, Japanese language volunteer teachers, and Filipino women from Kyoto - and enjoyed walking around the city of Kyoto. While walking through the streets of Kyoto, the Filipino women talked with each other and quickly became friends. They spent the 4 days filled with jokes and laughter and took many pictures. The participants from Fukushima were able to do most of the things in the list of "Want to do in Kyoto," which we asked the women on the first day of the Kyoto trip. The list included activities such as: going to Arashiyama, Higashiyama, and Kiyomizudera Temple, and eat maccha parfait, etc. Though we were unable to have the participants dress up like Maiko dancers, we had them spend one whole day in Osaka Minami. Some of the women got lost but they came back safely and said they "asked people on the streets for directions and felt the people in Osaka were very nice." On one night the participants used the hotel kitchen for long-stay guests and cooked Filipino dishes for the Kyoto YWCA members.

On the day of returning to Fukushima, the participants were busy buying souvenirs, including "battera" (a kind of sushi), for their families in Kyoto station. They were so busy they almost missed the bullet train back to Fukushima.

During a home-cooked meal party by Kyoto YWCA members, one participant said to us, "I was

really tired and was thinking of canceling my trip to Kyoto, but I'm really glad I came." That really made me feel happy.

Yamamoto Chie, member of Kyoto YWCA and EIWAN Operating Committee member

Supporting children with foreign roots living in Fukushima

My visit to Tsubasa and Hawak Kamai

By Hiki Atsuko

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EIWAN is one of the organizations funded by 2014 "Heiwa-no Kizuna (Building bonds for peace) Fund" operated by NCC's Education Department. On July 13, I joined the members of EIWAN to visit Fukushima's immigrant women's self-help groups, Sukagawa Tsubasa and Hawak Kamai.

Sukagawa Tsubasa – support group for children born between Japanese and Chinese parents – have both Japanese and Chinese names. It is a group whose activities are focused on teaching the double-blood children Chinese, which is their heritage language to the level of being able to speak it, and offer opportunities for the Chinese mothers, who have settled in Japan, to help each other to make everyday life enjoyable. The group consists of about 60 people, including family members.

On the day of the visit, I got off at Sukagawa Station, via Koriyama. We drove through rural scenery for about 30 minutes and finally reached the Wakase community hall. In the premise, a large machine indicating the level of radioactivity was set up prominently. This made me think about the level of anxiety the immigrant women in Fukushima must be dealing with.

Tsubasa was formed after the 3.11 earthquake by Chinese immigrant women, especially those with children living in Fukushima. Currently, the group holds Chinese lessons for children twice a month. Since the children are aged from 3 to about 14, they are split into two groups and taught separately. There are 3 teachers, mainly Chinese women who are also mothers and have graduated from Japanese universities. Aside from the Chinese language class, the group also holds bazaar, picnic, and other fun events including camping. Unfortunately, they have been lacking both human and monetary resources.

In Fukushima, there are many Chinese women who are married to Japanese men. Because their children have Japanese names, one cannot tell the different cultural backgrounds just from their looks. On the day of our visit, the group members and family, a total of 70 people, gathered at the gymnasium after the Chinese lessons and welcomed us with homemade Chinese foods. Many family members, including Japanese grandparents and Chinese grandparents, who came all the way from China to see their grandchildren, gathered for the lunch party and we all had a very good time. From the Heiwano

Kizuna Fund, which is supported by donations from church schools and Sunday schools throughout Japan, we gave a young male student and his parents some money for him to buy textbooks for his new school.

In the afternoon, we went to see the "Japanese language salon" held at Shirakawa Citizens Activity Center. Filipino members from Hawak Kamai, Shirakawa were learning Japanese with their teacher, as they worked to fill in a questionnaire on the 3.11 earthquake by EIWAN. The questionnaire was a bit difficult for a member to fill in by herself, therefore, they helped each other to make sure each member understood the meaning of the questions and wrote correct answers. For the Filipino women who married Japanese men and had children, being provided with accurate information and assistance as citizens of their own communities helps them build up their will to live strongly.

After the Japanese lessons, we had some delicious homemade yakisoba and fried bananas with the children.

Raising "double blood" children, especially when they are in puberty, can be very difficult at times. But if friends and supporters who might have similar problems are close to them to give support, they can talk to them and feel better. Places like Sunday mass and gabfest, and knowing that they have supporters like EIWAN can make them feel safe in many ways, and I think that means a great deal.

In Shirakawa, we also gave some money to a female student, who started senior high school this year, and her mother for buying textbooks.

During our visit, an old Chinese couple who came to see their grandchildren said something that left a strong impression on me. They said: "We came to Japan worried about the increasing anti-Chinese sentiment, but now that we know our children and grandchildren are being supported by Japanese organizations and the children are living comfortably, we feel very relieved."

I could sense the strong anxiety they had about their daughter and grandchildren, who not only live in a foreign country but in Fukushima, and the feeling of appreciation for the Japanese supporters who help their loved ones. This experience has made me feel stronger about realizing the legislative goal and working on necessary issues one-by-one to make Japan a multicultural society where people will genuinely accept immigrants and their children as equal community members. I am very happy to know that Heiwano Kizuna Fund can take part in this process.