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(English & 日本語 spoken)

volunteerAKITA was established and run by US JET participant, Paul Yoo. Paul was placed in Yurihonjo, Akita-ken from July 2009 – April 2012 when he completed his tenure on JET. Paul negotiated an early termination of his contract with his BOE due to a job offer in the USA and he departed on good terms with his community and employer. volunteerAKITA remains an active organization under new leadership since Paul's return to his home-country.

JETAA USA disbursed \$5000 (JPY 382,932) from the JETAA USA Earthquake Fund to volunteerAKITA in September 2011. volunteerAKITA utilized JPY 326,915 of the mini-grant, returning JPY 56,017 to the JETAA USA Fund in June of 2012. volunteerAKITA was being run on funds from donations from the general public. Members of this organization often paid out of pocket for travel expenses, etc. The mini-grant from JETAA USA allowed volunteerAKITA to continue serving communities hit by the Tohoku earthquake/ tsunami and helped to relieve some of the financial burdens of volunteering to its members. A short report of general activities the funds were used for is below:

JETAAi Volunteerism Consultation and Joint JET/JETAA Volunteer Trip

Paul shared his experiential knowledge of volunteering in the wake of the Tohoku Disaster with JETAA International and associated Japanese governmental departments. He assisted the 2011 JETAA International Meeting delegation in traveling to/ from Rikuzentakata, Iwate-ken for a day of volunteer work and meeting with local government representatives. The meeting and subsequent volunteer trip occurred in October 2011. Paul attended this conference to share his first-hand knowledge of how JETAAi could support smaller volunteer organizations like volunteerAKITA and to help guide the volunteer trip to Rikuzentakata, ensuring it went smoothly. Paul's work both pre-conference and on the ground were paramount to the success of this volunteer trip which included delegates from JETAAi, MOFA, CLAIR and current JET participants.

Regular volunteerAKITA Activities

Funds from the JETAA USA Earthquake Fund were used to offset travel expenses and general volunteerism costs in response to the Tohoku earthquake/ tsunami.

The first trip funded to Rikuzentakata (October 2011), in conjunction with the JETAAi conference was a full day of volunteering clearing tsunami debris, which concluded with a meeting with Mayor Toba of Rikuzentakata. As mentioned above, there was a large representation of JET alumni, current JETs in the Tohoku area, as well as representatives from CLAIR and MOFA. It was a great experience by all, especially for those who were volunteering for the first time.

Other trips included 3 visits to an orphanage in Sendai (Sendai Tenshi En) between December 2011 and March 2012. volunteerAKITA became involved with Sendai Tenshi En after the disaster providing them with relief goods/requested items while also creating a scholarship fund to raise money for orphans looking to attend college. In the months following the disaster, volunteerAKITA made several trips to

the orphanage to check in with them and also to visit with the kids. During Christmas, volunteerAKITA utilized grant funds and collaborated with Andy Anderson of the Taylor Anderson Memorial Fund (TAMF) to provide Christmas presents for all of the orphans at Sendai Tenshi En. The kids were amazed by all of the presents and the event was a huge success. Funds were also used to purchase a new television for the orphanage facility, at item requested by the orphanage director.

The last trip (March 2012) funded by the grant involved a 1-year anniversary/ memorial service of the Tohoku Disaster, which took place in the coastal town of Otsuchi, Iwate-ken. volunteerAKITA representatives (all Akita JETs for this event) helped set up/ break down the event in addition to preparing food, handing out flowers, lighting candles and providing general event support. The event had a huge turnout and was a moving experience for everyone who participated.

Funds from JETAA USA helped support volunteerAKITA to make 3 volunteer trips throughout the Tohoku Region. We had approximately 30 JET participants volunteer in relief efforts through these trips. Although there are no statistics to measure the effects this organization had on the people and communities it served, these types of grassroots and people to people connections are often better measured by the kind words, smiles and show of friendship that transcend cultures and international boundaries. volunteerAKITA could not have carried out this relief work without the support of the JETAA USA alumni network and this mini-grant.