



Tohoku Action Project

One year after the tsunami, I took part in a volunteer activity in Oshima, which is one of the most beautiful islands in Japan and also was destroyed seriously by the tsunami last year as well. Before coming there, the TV and newspapers talked a lot about how Japan has recovered after the disaster. Most of the news has shown their audiences that Japan has recovered quickly and it seems people in those areas have come back to the same daily life as it was before the earthquake and tsunami. Therefore, when SINTAP announced they would organize the volunteer activity in Oshima, Tohoku, I did not think that we could do anything there because everything had already been done. However, after coming to Oshima, I not only changed my mind, but also learned a lot from this trip.

When arriving, I realized a large area need to be cleaned so that they could rebuild buildings and offices there. A huge ship was pushed onto the island by the tsunami and is still there. A huge garbage collection area is set up near the seashore. From far away, I could see a picture with contrast colors: a sky full of sunshine, a blue sea and a huge mountain of dirty garbage. Thousands of cars, motorbikes, TV, wood, etc. destroyed last year have been placed near the beautiful beach. After one year, the condition is still so messy that it is hard to imagine how it was last year. Through the stories I have heard from local people, I know that the situation on the island last year was terrible. They were isolated from the mainland and lacked food and water. Ordinary people would be so fierce in that kind of bad situation. However, the Japanese spirit is so strong and it becomes stronger in difficult circumstances. Many local people like Takahiro's family (the family we interviewed) have shared all their food with others although at that time they also risked dying of hunger because of the isolation. I admired their bravery, especially the spirit of members of the Obakatai Group. They worked five continuous days without sleeping, just eating some small cookies and drinking water in the lake to save their island. Even a small boy knows and wants to rescue victims in that earthquake and tsunami. The disaster could not get the Japanese people down, and in fact the Japanese have overcome it.

Moreover, the tsunami even inspired a twelve-year-old boy named Koki-kun to dream of becoming a rescuer. He established and led the Obakatai Group for youth. Let's think what you did when you were twelve years old. I am sure most of us thought about playing rather than helping others.

Besides of their spirit, my second impression when coming to Oshima is that the local people are so kind and friendly. On the third day in Oshima, I had a chance to work in a seaweed factory for a local family. They were so kind when offering me many kinds of local food. They told me many stories about their life before and after the tsunami. They taught me how to plant, harvest and process seaweed. All this information was totally new to me. They were eager to learn Vietnamese as well. They asked me to write my name and some Vietnamese words on their wall so that they can read it every day. This action made me happy. Moreover, I was even more happy when our bus was on top of a mountain and we could still see them on the beach waving their hands to say goodbye to us. Not many people I have met are as friendly as them.

Through this trip, I feel I am too small in comparison with people in Oshima. They are great men and real unnamed heroes. They were united to overcome difficulties together, and when having peace, they live harmoniously with each other. People in Oshima have a lot of valuable qualities which not many people in the modern world have. Therefore, in the future I will try to contribute more for our society by taking part in more volunteer activities and helping surrounding people as much as I can. Moreover, I will also try to have those qualities like the people in Oshima.

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