

Grassroots Academy Tohoku 2017 in Iwate Report



The “Grassroots Academy Tohoku” program provides a space for women from Tohoku’s three prefectures (Iwate, Miyagi, and Fukushima) responsible for the next generation to gather, learn together, and network. Since starting the program in 2015, we have hosted 159 total participants. From 2016 onwards we incorporated daycare into the program in order to not exclude women with children from our learning opportunities. In this Academy, our fourth in Tōhoku, we focused on the theme of “making a team.”

The Three Pillars of the Academy

- 1 In order to learn from each other’s experiences, everyone must contribute
- 2 To take home with us skills and specific measures for resolving issues
- 3 To observe practices in other areas and put them to use in one’s own area

Overview of Activities

Dates	October 27 (Fri) – 29 (Sun), 2017
Participants	38 total (including staff, children, and affiliates) 18 women/6 children/3 student interns (Support: TOMODACHI)
Organizer	Women’s Eye
Support	JEN
Sponsorship	Japan National Committee for UN Women

Instructors



Kazumi Yoshida
CEO,
Excellent Organization
Development, Inc.



Naomi Yoshida
Representative,
Kurashi no Sapōtazu



Miyoko Satō
Midwife Representative,
Manmaru Mama Iwate



Yasuhiro Otomo
CEO,
Hanamaki Yamorisha

Program Schedule

Day 1 Morioka City Nanshōsō

- 12:30 Orientation
- 13:15 Team-building, Problem-solving
- 16:30 Travel to Co-working Space “arukoko”
- 17:00 Lecture: Characterizing Behavioral Diversity
- 19:00 Administrative Messages, Dinner,
Sharing the Academy’s Vision

Day 2

- 6:30-9:30 Breakfast
- 9:30 Orientation
- 9:45 Participant Self-introductions
- 12:30 Lunch
- 13:30 Participant Self-introductions
- 15:00 Lecture: Living Supporters
(Kurashi no Sapōtazu)
- 17:00 Day Ends
- 18:30 Administrative Messages, Dinner

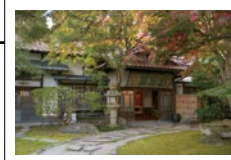
Day 3 Hanamaki City

- 6:30-9:30 Breakfast
- 9:00 Arrival in Hanamaki
Case Study: Manmaru Mama Iwate
- 11:45 Case Study: Hanamaki co-ba,
Hanamaki Yamorisha
- 12:30 Lunch
- 13:20 Reflections on the Three Days
- 15:15 Program Ends

What is the Grassroots Academy?

In March 2015, as a pre-event of the Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction, the Huairou Commission held the first “Grassroots Academy” in Minamisanriku Town as an empowerment program for women working at the local level. Following this, the program was taken over by Women’s Eye, a localized nonprofit working in Japan with a particular focus on the three prefectures impacted by the 2011 disaster (Iwate, Miyagi, and Fukushima). Participants must be women in their 30s or younger, working in some kind of local organization. In February 2017, we held an international training in Seattle. In February 2018, we are planning another international training in Los Angeles.

The three-day program began in the tatami-floored main room of Nanshōsō, a traditional Japanese house whose garden boasts stunning autumn leaves. The following is a day-by-day report of the program.



Day 1

10/27
Friday

Opening, Team Building

Participants headed to lunch as they finished their registration. As acquaintances greeted each other, conversation spread around the room. You could sense the participants' growing expectations.



◆Team-building Challenge: Chocolate River

The program began after lunch. To introduce this Academy's theme of "making a team," we started with team-building work led by facilitator Kazumi Yoshida. After an ice-breaker in which we called out each other's names, we split into two teams and played a game in which participants, through communicating with and supporting each other, had to reach a goal without falling off small mats symbolizing marshmallows. Any infringement of the rules resulted in the number of mats being reduced. Finally, after many attempts, they suc-



ceeded. Each group then talked together about what they felt had encouraged them, and why. How had they informed each other about the situation? What words produced opportunities for

change? Although it seemed like simple fun, this game had a lot going on beneath the surface.



The next team-building work was a time trial involving a ball. As

each team's understanding of the rules increased they improved, finally achieving an amazing speed. While members reflected on what had happened — "why was this team able to achieve this?" — they considered how to effect something similar in their own activities.

◆Lecture at Co-Working Space "arukoko"

We moved to the center of Morioka, where we listened to Kazumi Yoshida lecture on people's behavioral characteristics while also self-diagnosing which of those characteristics accurately described us. As a group, we then discussed how those characteristics could be used for team-building.



Day 2

10/28
Saturday

Introducing Activities, Lecture

◆Participants' Activities Introduction Circuit

This training helps one to convey one's activities to people briefly and efficiently. The participants conducted cycles of four 3-minute introductions (with



listeners and presenters switching) at four designated booths until everyone had introduced themselves to each other. For repeat participants, this was a chance to raise their skill level, while beginners were

impressed at how much one could convey in only three minutes.



◆Lecture by Naomi Yoshida Living Supporters (Kurashi no Sapōtāzu)

Through working with the destitute, Ms Yoshida realized how necessary it is to not only try and solve problems, but also incorporate "happiness" into one's

goals. Since establishing an NPO called Kurashi no Sapōtāzu after the Great East Japan earthquake, she has run a living advisory service called “Tomorrow’s Life Counselling.”

In Japan today, 30,000 people kill themselves every year, with one person disappearing every year in pre-disaster Rikuzentakata City. Ms Yoshida spoke about the perspective she feels is necessary for creating an inclusive, livable society for everyone. She also warned us of the dangers of becoming overly distracted and neglecting to care for our minds. Finally, alongside the participants from the venue, we

shared our thoughts on the phenomenon of “blaming” people.



Day 3 10/29
Sunday

After breakfast, we left for Hanamaki

◆Case Study 1

Instructor : Miyoko Satō, Midwife Representative, Manmaru Mama Iwate

We visited the offices of Manmaru Mama Iwate in Hanamaki City, the center of activity for instructor Miyoko Satō, who has been a regular participant since the beginning of the Grassroots Academy program. She spoke about the process of getting from the early stages, when they were caring for expectant and nursing mothers after the Great East Japan earthquake, to the opening of Iwate Prefecture’s first pre- and post-natal care house, Manmaru Potto. It was a story of evolving comradeship, with an early series of interpersonal troubles, growing experience of team-building through community organizing, and the improving of close relationships through greater willingness to “show weakness.” Caught between tears and laughs, the participants were full of respect and empathy for Ms Satō, who wore her heart on her sleeve during the lecture. The time after the lecture was intense, with many questions, responses, and stories of people’s own experiences. Lots of participants commented that her story had inspired them to reevaluate their own situations.



◆Case Study 2

Instructor : Yasuhiro Otomo, CEO, Hanamaki Yamorisha

We moved to Hanamaki’s first co-working space, “co-ba Hanamaki.” We listened to a talk by a young executive, who is spearheading efforts to improve the

neighborhood around the station while also renovating and running this building. As we listened to him talk about how they revived the Marukan Department Store in front of the station, we realized how unlikely a project it had been. “It’s OK if there is nobody walking in the streets,” he told us. “So long as those who live here are rich in spirit, and so long as they are willing to challenge themselves, even if the population falls it will be a good town, a rich town.” We were impressed by his emphasis on the importance of increasing the number of people willing to take leading roles.



◆Time for Reflection

We had lunch in the first-floor lounge. It had been redecorated and had a pleasant atmosphere. After lunch, we returned to “co-ba Hanamaki,” and after quietly reflecting on what we had gained during these three days, we took time to share these thoughts with each other. Some participants were afraid of going back to their normal lives the next day, but were reassured by veteran participants that “it’s OK, things won’t just go back to how they were. You’ve grown, even if you don’t realize it.”





Reflections on the Grassroots Academy Tohoku 2017 in Iwate

Miyoko Satō (Manmaru Mama Iwate)

The world looked different after the training

Although at my desk and in meetings I'm always thinking about the organization, I was surprised at how working with your body can instantly deepen your understanding in a fun way. The effects of such training aren't immediately visible; I've been participating for three years, and now I feel like I'm seeing the fruits of my efforts. When you return from training, you find the same reality and the same worries, but you are not the same. Your worries won't be exhausted, but with your new perspective, the world will look different.

I'm really grateful that the Academy was affordable and easy to participate in for young women. Now that I've been asked to participate as an instructor, it feels like my long-awaited graduation!

Maki Satō (Fukushima 30-Year Project)

I definitely feel stronger

We focus on radiation monitoring and spreading awareness, and most of our members are male engineers. My role is to figure out the needs of worried mothers. Every time I participate in an Academy, I feel that I definitely get stronger, with new ideas for how to solve problems welling up inside me. I have a tendency to bottle things up and push myself too hard, but when you "speak up," somebody will help you out. When we ask each other, "why are you doing this?", I think we become more able to share our weaknesses. I hope the new participants will have high expectations for themselves going forward.



Takamichi Akita

(Ministry of Reconstruction, Gender Equality
Team Project Manager)

Making Use of Both Individual and Team Qualities

I am grateful for being allowed to participate on the final day of the Academy. I saw how each participant from Tōhoku was grappling with issues in their region, taking positive action, and, when they were discouraged or faced with problems, consulting with their friends, understanding each other, and forging even further ahead; in a positive sense, I saw how strong women are, and how they put both their individual and collective skills to work in their activities.

I was very impressed when a participant said, "I'm not doing anything that big, and it's not like I'm particularly special; I'm just doing what I feel I have to do."

Grassroots Academy Tohoku 2017 in Iwate A Word from Participants

Although I was nervous when we were calling out names, the Chocolate River game shrunk the distance between us in an instant.

I don't have many opportunities to meet women with such diverse experiences, so it was great to learn about their different values and see my own options increase.

I felt that I hadn't been communicating enough; I'd been bottling stuff up and keeping things self-contained so much.

I realized that right now I'm in a period of confusion. This was a chance for me to step things up.

I realized a lot during the work we did around the word "blame"; it really convinced me.

I really felt that even for tasks that seem impossible, if you challenge yourself without fear of failure you've taken the first step towards success.

Although the theme was "making a team," I realized that I was still at the stage of figuring out what kind of person I am and what situation I'm in.

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