

# Grassroots Academy Tohoku 2017 in Miyagi 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. The first event was held in February 2016 in Iwate. In this event – our third in Tohoku to date – we focused on the theme of “harnessing diversity.” 19 people participated in the three-day program.

## 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

**Dates** May 12 (Fri) – 14 (Sun), 2017

**Participants** 19 (6 in their 20s, 13 in their 30s);  
39 total including staff, children and other related parties

**Organizer** Women’s Eye

**Cooperation** JEN

## Program/Schedule

### Day 1

13:00 Orientation  
13:15 Team Building  
16:00 Lecture: Diverse Character Traits  
18:00 Notices, Dinner, Social Gathering

### Day 2

6:45 Morning Yoga (voluntary)  
7:30 Breakfast  
8:30 Orientation  
8:40 Participant Introductions  
11:10 Lecture: Renewable Energy and the Regions  
12:10 Lunch  
13:10 Case Study: Building Consensus among Residents in the Ōya Coast  
15:30 Discussion, Q&A, Application to Participant’s Activities  
18:00 Notice, Dinner

### Day 3

7:00 Breakfast  
9:45 Arrived in Yamamoto Town  
10:00 Case Study: Polaris  
12:00 Lunch  
13:00 Mural Viewing, Arrive at Ichigo World  
13:30 Reflections on the Three Days  
15:00 End

## Instructors



**Kazumi Yoshida**  
Experiential Team  
Building Facilitator



**Hiromi Taguchi**  
Director, Polaris



**Tomoyuki Miura**  
Director, Project Rias;  
Ōya Satoumi-zukuri  
Kentōinkai



**Makoto Tajima**  
Researcher, Institute  
for Sustainable  
Energy Policy

## 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 developed by Women’s Eye, a localized nonprofit working in Japan with a particular focus on the three prefecture 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. We plan to hold our next domestic event in Iwate in October 2017. In February 2017, we held an international training in Seattle. In February 2018, we are planning another international training in Los Angeles.



The “Grassroots Academy Tohoku 2017 in Miyagi” program was held in the Laforet Zaō Resort and Spa in Miyagi Prefecture’s Togatta Hot Spring area. The following report will describe the activities held over the three days and two nights of the program.



Day 1

5/12  
(Fri)

## Opening, Team Building

### ◆ Beginning with Group Activities

In order to bodily experience what “making use of diversity” means, we were directed to go out to the grass by facilitator Kazumi Yoshida. After a calming walk during which we exchanged names, we were split into three teams and instructed to solve two tasks using our bodies. Although both seemed impossible at first, we were encouraged by the instructor’s reminders that “everyone has always managed to complete them,” and made progress through trial and error.



Once all the teams had solved the tasks, we reflected in depth on our team dynamics during the activity. What was the secret of success? On returning indoors, the teams continued to analyze in greater depth.

### ◆ Learning about Behavioral Diversity through Lectures and Discussions

One of the keys to success was whether diverse opinions had been expressed and the group had carried out a small plan-do-act-check cycle. After reflecting on the tasks, Kazumi Yoshida explained the theory of the four basic personality traits and how they can be harnessed through organizational design. We checked which traits matched our own personalities, and shared our experiences with other participants who fit the same categories. After this, we discussed what differences exist between the various categories of participants.



Day 2

5/13  
(Sat)

## Introducing Activities, Case Studies



### ◆ Academy Participants’ Activity Introduction Circuit

To train participants how to convey their activities to people concisely and efficiently, we had them conduct three 3-minute introductions in a row (with listeners and presenters switching) at three designated booths. Having got to know each other through group work and dining together the previous day, people received each other with empathy.

### ◆ Lecture on the Future of the Regions and Business Models for Citizen-Generated Electricity

Makoto Tajima gave a lecture on schemes for making sustainable energy possible in Japan’s regions. Through detailed discussions of profitability and financial arrangements, he explored a number of case studies. As there are many areas thinking of introducing such schemes, there was a lively question and answer session.



### ◆Case Study 1

#### How to Make Progress on Regional Issues without Driving a Wedge between People with Diverse Positions

Ōya Satoumi-zukuri Kentōinkai  
Tomoyuki Miura

After the disaster, plans were raised to build a sea-wall along Kesennuma City's famed and beautiful Ōya Coast. Tomoyuki Miura presented a rare example of how, based on a shared vision of "protecting the beach," his group was able to achieve significant changes to the plans through bringing in

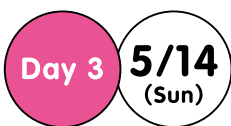


local stakeholders, including the local citizen's association, building consensus among residents (even if it was hard-going at times), and lobbying the government.

There was a lot of back and forth in the question and answer session. How was he able to maintain a neutral position? How did people control their anger? How was he able to develop such a high level of resilience? The questions focused heavily on how activists should comport themselves.

### ◆Thinking about Problems without Answers

Facilitator Kazumi Yoshida led us in an exercise break called "Human Puzzle Ring." On starting, we realized that unlike the previous day there was no clear way of solving the task. We sat down in groups, discussed what we had felt and learned from Miura's presentation, and made short presentations. There was much talk about making time for people, observing, and determining right and wrong without hurting people.



## Case Study 2, Reflecting on the Academy

### ◆Case Study 2

#### Hints from Children and the Disabled, A Perspective on Sustainable Management

Director, Polaris Hiromi Taguchi

Three years after she became head of a day center for the mentally disabled, the Great East Japan Earthquake struck. Her art project, which began as a way of restarting the activities of the center, grew to be a community revitalization program not just for the disabled, but for everybody in the region. This led her to establish a new, independent nonprofit. The going was hard. But, through striving for happiness, she was able to deal with the difficult times in good humor.

Polaris provides specialized mental care, art programs, and networking opportunities for the disabled, who are also helping out in areas where there is a shortage of labor in the region, such as cleaning the greenhouses for the local specialty strawberries. They also manage social enterprises to give back to the community, and by providing "necessary things" contribute to the development of a sustainable society. Through expressing and challenging themselves, the slightly older girls participating in the programs have found many companions in the area. The participants were energized by the lively talk, and as many were interested in the art program, the air was



filled with questions.

After viewing murals Polaris had created in front of the train station, we moved to a community space inside Ichigo World, a groundbreaking new strawberry greenhouse. A tapestry produced by Polaris, "The Great Adventure of Prince Strawberry," was on display here.



### ◆Time for reflection

How has our understanding of diversity progressed? What common threads stretched across the three days? We broke into groups to share what we had realized, what had stayed with us, and what we had shared together. Afterwards, there was time set aside to reflect by oneself on the training, and finally one-by-one we presented our main takeaways.





## Expert Perspectives on the Grassroots Academy Tohoku in Miyagi



**Kazumi Yoshida**  
Experiential Team Building Facilitator

### The Young Women's High Level of Performance Gives Me Hope

Until now, most of the team building activities I've run have been for corporate workers, and compared to them I felt that the young women's motivation, communication skills, and overall performance improved at a much earlier stage.

The reality is that in our corporate culture, there are few opportunities for women to learn organizational management. 25 years ago, the number of women in leadership and management trainings was zero. Even today, only 10% or so of people receiving management training are women. The fact that there are even fewer of these opportunities in the regions makes it really isolating.

My hope is that when you provide a space for people to learn in the Academy, they will be able to immediately use what they've learned in their communities and places of work. This is real grassroots work, reinvigorating not big organizations, but small teams rooted in their areas. (Interview)



**Jackie Steele**  
Professor, Tokyo University

### Supporting the Foundation and Transformative Power of a Democratic Society through Diverse Communities

On this occasion, I was reminded of the lessons I have learned as a feminist scholar. Lessons on the importance of not shutting yourself up in a single identity, whether it's "mother," "woman," "victim," or "scholar"; on the importance of adopting a stance where you permit yourself – the holder of many values, dreams, and roles – to change. This practice of not "fixing" ourselves, of holding this flexible stance, is both a source of strength and our duty as private citizens. In representative democracies there are usually only two parties (ways of thinking) available to us at the national level, but at the local level this is not the case. There are innumerable diverse ways of being, thinking, and dreaming available to us. This is the key to society's strength. Just as species diversity is essential for a sustainable future for planet earth, a society with social diversity is better able to distribute risk, which is foundational to democratic societies. Instead of becoming inflexible, we come to accept the potential for change and innovation. If you make a space where yourself and others can reconstruct themselves, the path opens for reconstructing society. I have great respect for the participants in the academy, who are carrying out this important function at the grassroots level (Interview).



## Participant Survey

Connecting with and learning from other people in the disaster regions felt really meaningful.

I learned that when everyone buys into a shared vision, diversity could be used in a positive way.

I was reminded of how important it is to empathize, and am incorporating this into my own practice.

I met lots of people that can guide me when I'm unsure about my activities.

Until now, I would just grumble and complain and that would be it, but now I can see specific ways of breaking through.

## Grassroots Academy Tohoku Contact

### NPO Women's Eye

10-1, Yamanokamidaira, Aza, Iriya, Minamisanriku-cho,  
Motoyoshi-gun, Miyagi, 986-0782, JAPAN  
womensacademyintohoku@gmail.com  
Megumi Ishimoto, Sachiko Taura



Women's Eye



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Miki Shiimoto  
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Yukari Sakurada  
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Hiromi Furusato



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JEN is an NGO that provides support for people in difficult situations following wars and natural disasters around the world at every stage from relief to reconstruction. Through partnering with local organizations in Iwate, Miyagi, and Fukushima, they provide support for women, youth, and children in the disaster regions.