



Free Clinical-Educational Center for Fukushima

# Newsletter from Heart of Fukushima

Vol.4

April, 2015

## Prefatory Note

A year and six months have passed since the opening of the center. A year ago, I reported on the opening of the community college, in the second issue of the newsletter half a year after the opening. I wrote: “In September 2013, we opened a free clinic targeted for PTSR / PTSD opening four days a month in Fukushima. Its opening was featured in the newspaper and people who had heard by word-of-mouth came to participate in the psycho-educational program and almost every participant presented some kind of traumatic or stress reaction. Despite the number of participants to the programs, there were few people seeking for treatment for PTSR / PTSD. This was the reality of Fukushima in September 2013, two and a half years after the earthquake.” Now a year has passed, the number of people who seek individual consults about reactions to the disaster is gradually, but definitely, increasing.

This indicates a crisis. People who seek individual consult carry pain which they bear and bear, and finally when they can bear no more they seek help. Tears well up and emotions overflow as they try to speak. Things are becoming unbearable for people who have been enduring for the past four years. The recovery of the people is not proceeding; rather problems are becoming more serious. However this could also be regarded as a chance. For people are on the verge of breakdown, they could utter their cry for help. For people are in the midst of suffering, there is a chance to encounter a clinician who could truly be of help. There is the chance for one to acquire a rich and valuable, though it may be painful, time and space to face one’s experience of the disaster and one’s life.

The center is now at a turning point. In this newsletter we will report on the current activities of the center at such time of change. Kayoko Hige will be reporting on the training sessions of “Hidden Impact” which has advanced from relay of lectures of the community college. Yoshiya Ishikawa, a joke therapist, will be reporting on “Joke Therapy” held in the center; why jokes, and why jokes are needed in Fukushima.

Four years are about to pass since the Great East Japan Earthquake. Coverage by mass media emphasizes the restoration of materials and the economy. Pain and suffering that people still carry are left behind. In the former election, the problems of nuclear power and restoration from the disaster were not addressed as issues. The boom has already faded away. From now on, it is a challenge for people who truly face the situation. I believe there is hope in the center continuing to function as a place / device where people who truly challenge come together, bringing more people to exchange each of their different abilities, knowledge, and energy.

(Toshinori Hanai, M.A., Secretary-General of FCECFR)

## The Workshop of “Hidden Impact ”

Kayoko Hige, M.A.

Certified Registered Clinical Psychologist of FCECFR

We have started a new workshop on our open Sundays from October, 2014. This workshop is for learning psychological care and reconstruction after disasters based on the textbook, “Hidden Impact—What You Need to Know for the Next Disaster: a Practical Mental Health Guide for Clinicians—”, which was translated by responding team of EJ center and their colleagues with the translation advisor, Hidefumi Kotani, the clinical organizer of our center.



Ms. Hige on the workshop

Ever since the Great East Japan Earthquake, there have been so many aftershocks and nobody knows if and when this set of earthquakes will come to an end. However, the discussion about abandonment of nuclear plants is not active and the continuation of the plants is passively allowed at present.

Earthquakes occur very frequently in Japan and we do not know when and where the next big earthquake will happen. It is important for us to know what we can do when the next disaster occurs. We cannot prevent natural disasters, but we can prepare for them and prevent human disasters.

Even if the government does not show us clear policies for natural disasters, we can and should do something for ourselves. Those who think this way in Fukushima come to our workshop and the two hours pass surprisingly fast.

Our textbook is the latest practical mental health guide for clinicians written after the 9.11 in the US by top-level mental health professionals. However, it is now over 4 years since the original version has been published and there are many differences in damages between the 9.11 terrorist attacks and 3.11 the Great East Japan Earthquake. Therefore we can learn a lot from this textbook but cannot utilize the descriptions directly.

The participants do not passively listen to the lecture since they are trying to absorb the textbook and know practical actions they can take when the next disaster occurs. We have wide-ranging discussions including our own experiences of the 3.11 and thoughts and feelings we have not expressed so much, complaint and expectation for the government, and what we can do to prepare for the next disaster both physically and mentally.

We can never ignore the damage from the terrible disaster of the past, so we must get the most out of our experiences. Nobody can avoid the next natural disaster, but we can always start to prepare, for it is never too late. We are the people who shall not make natural disaster into the human disaster ever again. Our workshop started with this strong belief of people of Fukushima.



The Workshop in January, 2015

## The Joke Group

Yoshiya Ishikawa, M.A.

Certified Registered Clinical Psychologist of FCECFR

Jokes are not only enjoyable plays on words but also represent the wisdom of human beings to maintain a sense of freedom and dignity in the midst of adversity. We have been developing techniques using jokes (the Joke Group) for preventing PTSD and a therapeutic approach for dealing with psychological trauma through our activities to support the people after the 3.11 disasters. The Joke group consists of three parts: listening to jokes, telling jokes, and making jokes. In the session of listening to jokes, the leader tells jokes from various cultures and the members enjoy the experiences of listening to jokes and get accustomed with the joke culture. Secondly, in the session of telling jokes, the members try to tell jokes to the group using joke cards prepared by the leader. Finally, in the part of making jokes, members make jokes with other members, based upon experiences they have had of being angry or irritated.



The Joke Group by Mr. Ishikwa, October, 2014.

As Freud puts it, jokes enable us to express what we have suppressed or repressed through play on words. In a joke group I had led at the Fukushima Center, the members, seemed puzzled about listening to and telling jokes at first, but gradually started to enjoy expressing aggressive and sexual energies, and other feelings by jokes and became energetic. The place of the workshop became increasingly safe enabling members to express anything in the atmosphere of enjoying nonsense created by jokes. Moreover, jokes have a function of turning passive experience into active mastery. Psychological trauma is the experience of being overwhelmed by a harsh external reality and staying in that situation may easily give rise to damages of ego functions. Telling and making jokes reverses that mode in a playful way and provides many opportunities for strengthening ego resilience. Although just talking about an annoying experience with peers has a cathartic effect, the exercise of creating jokes of those experiences helps members to actively change the experience into a joke and laughter, that is, in effect “the triumph of the pleasure principle” and “the triumph of narcissism” (Freud, 1928) can be achieved in association with a rise in one’s self-esteem and strengthened ego resilience. One male member, a professional of oriental medicine, commented after the joke group, “those who think he/she is sick tend to cling to an idea of being sick. And doctors also see them sick. Jokes, however, enable to see things from a different perspective and free them from the idea of being sick.”

In Fukushima, there are many pressures from both outside and inside of individuals to restrict ones’ free expression on the context of expansions of several gaps between people, and prevailing denial of the harsh reality at a national and community level. I believe that the joke group can create a psychologically safe space for expressing ones’ feelings free from external and internal restriction and help to enhance ego resilience in such a severe situation.

## Closing Note

Four years have passed already from the awful event, the explosion of the first nuclear power station in Fukushima. The Pope calls it an event of the Tower of Babel. The Japanese government has not been doing or explaining enough against the destructive effect from the Tower of Babel. No opinion leaders, responsible parents nor adult citizens have taken any effective action and explanation to this critical situation for the people, especially the younger generations, living in the stricken areas. Under the unresolved nuclear problems, how can younger people and children hold images for their hopeful future and draw and build their life plan? Our industrially developed civilization has been already defeated, it has failed to work out effectively to stop this destruction and to have led to a realistic action for restoration of the community.

We are now in the fourth stage of the great natural disaster by earthquake and Tsunami, that is, the human made disaster (Kotani, et.al., 2013). The tower of Babel means that the human civilization ends by its own arrogant development. We, at present in this critical situation, are so weak and so powerless but cannot surrender, because this is caused by our own human arrogance. We surely have a chance to derive power for new restoration from current global impasse of arrogant development of civilization. This problem is not happening only in Fukushima, but also in other areas in Tohoku, as well as in other countries in Asia, Europe, Africa, North and South America. It is said that current break down of our civilization begins in 1979 (Caryl, 2013). We can restart for restoration of our new civilization, by human powers, not by political nor industrial powers. Our individual power seems to be of little significance but it becomes a bigger and more powerful one in terms of cultural based bond of individuals. An example is seen in Hiroshima. An active Major league baseball star player Kuroda came back to a Japanese local baseball team of Hiroshima Carp. He chose Hiroshima with quite less expensive offer rather than the grand offer of the Major league baseball teams. Strong bond between citizens and Kuroda won against the power of immense industrial money. It shows us the culture still has an unbelievable power against industrial and political power.

We need to raise this cultural power of people living in their hometown in Fukushima and would like to make new interface of the three functions of political, industrial and cultural domains for our creative future.

Hidefumi Kotani, PhD, CGP, Clinical Organizer of FCECFR

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