

“Support Immigrant Women in Fukushima 2014” to be launched

In cooperation with groups of women living in Fukushima with foreign roots

The Great East Japan Earthquake that occurred on March 11, 2011 and the subsequent tsunami and the radioactive contamination resulted from the nuclear power plant accident have had a complex, long-standing influences on people living in Fukushima. This is also true to foreign-born residents, especially women, who are part of the same local communities.

Currently, 9,117 foreign-born residents are registered in municipalities in Fukushima Prefecture, of which 2,848 are men and 6,269 are women, accounting for the overwhelming majority. Most of these women came and settle down in urban areas and countryside in Fukushima in the late 1980's due to international marriage. By nationality, 3,533 are Chinese, 2,057 are Filipinos, and 1,768 are South or North Koreans.

Although they have lived in Fukushima for many years, they have been unable to gain access to support to reconstruct their lives after the Earthquake, access to information about radiation and radioactivity, or access to public services to solve their problems in and outside their homes.

The Empowerment of Immigrant Women Affiliated Network (EIWAN) was established in February 2012 to support immigrant women living in Fukushima. In collaboration with Hawak Kamai Fukushima, a self-help and mutual aid group of Filipino women living in Fukushima, EIWAN has offered a variety of programs as follows:

- 1) In July 2012, Hawak Kamai Fukushima and EIWAN jointly organized “Fukushima Immigrant Residents Festival” in view to help create a network of immigrant women who live scatterly in Fukushima Prefecture. The event was the first of a kind held in Fukushima and attended by about 250 people.
- 2) EIWAN opened Japanese salons in Fukushima City in February 2013 and in Shirakawa City in May 2013. These are Japanese “salons”, not Japanese “schools,” because we hope these salons to become a place not only for immigrant women to learn Japanese so that they can expand their opportunities for employment and improve their problem-solving abilities in relation to human rights and daily lives, but also for Japanese supporters to get to know the immigrant women and to be

able to help them with their worries and troubles.

- 3) EIWAN gave counsel to immigrant women on the issues related with human rights (domestic violence, non-payment of wages, education for their children, etc) and accompanied them to public service offices and lawyer's offices.
- 4) EIWAN held a seminar on radioactive contamination in Fukushima City with an expert lecturer and after the seminar, we had a counseling session for immigrant women who are raising children.

For immigrant women to become economically independent and reduce their vulnerabilities such as limited access to living information and human rights abuses, they need to develop their own problem-solving skills. Also, in order to build a multicultural community, cooperation with local residents is indispensable.

To this aim, we will continue our Japanese salons in Fukushima and Shirakawa and plan to host various types of salons in other locations. We also intend to offer personal support for immigrant single mothers, educational support for their children, self-development programs for immigrant women, radiation measurement, health check, training programs for local supporters, joint programs for both Japanese and immigrants, and provide support for immigrant women's organizations. The sole purpose of our activities is to help immigrant women and Japanese women get to know each other so that they can together create a society where people live peacefully together and mutually benefit from each other. We appreciate your continued support and active participation to realize this vision.

March 11, 2014

EIWAN Steering Committee members

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Kathryn Goto

Essay

My mother and me as a "double"

Hikari Goto

“The name is Kathryn!?” Somebody in my class uttered teasingly and other classmates started to giggle. Taken aback, I looked at the letter from school that was just handed out. It was an ordinary school letter. Nothing special—at least to them. But, to me, it appears to be something horrible. Among the words clearly printed in black ink with Mincho typeface, I found the name, which is so familiar to me---Kathryn Goto. It is my mother’s name.

I am a “half” between Japanese father and Filipino mother. I have never been particularly conscious about this because I have a friend who is also a half-Japanese, half-Filipino and we were always together from kindergarten through elementary school. But things changed in junior high school. There are more than 8 classes in one grade and pupils from the same elementary school were placed in different classes. I couldn’t be in the same class as my half-Filipino friend, either. Nevertheless, I made friends with new people and have been enjoying school life with them. And then, that happened.

Their giggles were still ringing in my ears. No friends of mine from my elementary school made fun of somebody’s name. I was very disappointed to know that my classmates are such people. At the same time, I felt incomprehensible anger deep within. If they had laughed at me, I would have just felt sad. But it was irritating that my family gets laughed at. As soon as I got back home, I slapped the school letter on the table and shouted to my father, “How come you didn’t put your name, Dad?” I was angry and also ashamed because my name was written under the guardian’s name. My father said, “I had no special intention. I just wrote Kay’s name. Why?” Kay is my mother’s nickname. I couldn’t say any more words. I couldn’t see his eyes. “I told you before that I want you to write your name on a document like this. That’s all. So, tell the teacher to change the name to be printed on school letters. I don’t like it.” My father said he got it and our conversation is over.

Next day, the weather was bad and Mother said she would give me a ride to school. I felt bad because of what happened only one day before, but Mother seemed not know anything about it and kept on talking to me. When her funny story came to an end, she opened her mouth. “By the way, there’s going to be a parent’s day soon, aren’t there? I’m off of work on that day, so I think I can come. What time does it start?” The smile on my face disappeared. The annoying giggles I heard yesterday started to echo again in my head. “No! Don’t! I don’t want you to come!” I couldn’t resist saying it. Mother’s angry eyes met mine in the rearview mirror. “Why do you say such a thing? I heard that you complained about the school letter. Do you hate me?” So, she knew everything about yesterday. But I didn’t want to say she can come, even as a lie. So, I kept silent. My mother’s voice was quavering with anger. I didn’t want to tell her about my honest feelings. Only I could do was to wish that we’d arrive at school soon.

Mother didn't show up on the parent's day. I felt guilty, but I also felt relieved that I could avoid that kind of happening. However, when I studied about human rights and discrimination in my social studies class, what occurred to my mind was Mother's face. Did I discriminate my mother? The more I thought about that day, the deeper I realized that the blame was on me. When I was small, I was bullied because I looked different from people around me. Almost everyday, I was spoken ill of by kids I didn't even know as we passed each other on my way back home. Is being different from others something that cannot be allowed? Child as I was, I thought that I shouldn't stand out and tried to blend with the people around me. Eventually, the bullying against me stopped. Maybe it is since then that I am so scared to be the only one who is different from all the other. It wasn't Mother's fault. I selfishly put the blame on my mother for me being different from people around me and hurt her with my words. Deep regret filled my mind. I cannot change the place of birth nor who gave birth to me. The only thing I can change is myself.

"Mom, I'm sorry. I want you to come to school and to parent's day. I'll never ask you to change the name on school letters." I told that to my mother, but she looked at me bewilderingly. So I said, "You know, about the quarrel we had on the other day . . ." Now she seemed to understand, but just said, "Oh, OK" and walked out of the room. But I knew how she felt by looking at her face. The tender expression and the subtle smile on her lips. At that moment, the gloomy thoughts cleared off from my mind.

"You are not half-blooded, but double-blooded. You've got two rather than half." When I heard these words for the first time, I felt so glad. I now know the reason why I vented my anger on my mother. I didn't have confidence in myself. I didn't have confidence and courage to openly disclose who I am. There is nothing I should be ashamed of. I am a "double" and my mother is a Filipino. That's all and nothing more or less.

*This composition won the first prize in 2013 Fukushima Prefecture Human Rights Essay Contest for Junior High School Students

Report

Japanese Salon members challenged JLPT

On December 1, 2013, 15 members of EIWAN Japanese Salons (5 from Fukushima Salon and 10 from Shirakawa Salon) challenged the Japanese-language Proficiency Test (JLPT), a test to measure and certify the Japanese-language proficiency of those whose native language is not Japanese. EIWAN has encouraged the Japanese Salon members to take this test for a couple of reasons: 1) To have a concrete objective in learning Japanese, 2) To know the actual level of their Japanese knowledge, 3) To be able to include an objective evaluation of their Japanese knowledge in their resume when they seek a job. Because our Japanese salons is not a place to prepare for

JLPT, we focused on the goal of knowing the current level of their Japanese proficiency and suggested that they choose the level that they think they can pass without too much overwork. As a result, 4 members from Fukushima Salon and 8 members from Shirakawa Salon successfully passed the test at different levels from Level 2 to Level 5.

At Fukushima Salon, a Filipino member, who attended the Salon every time with her children, passed Level 3, while other Filipino members, who live pretty far from the Salon and have to drive 30 to 60 minutes, took Level 2 or 3 so that they can find better jobs and successfully passed. There is also a member who started to learn how to read and write Japanese characters for the first time but passed Level 5. At Shirakawa Salon, a couple who are working in a factory studied and took the test together.

While the levels of the test were chosen based on their actual proficiency levels, the members studied hard so that they can pass with high scores. The good results were due not only to the member's efforts but also to the support and encouragement from the Japanese supporters of both salons. Congratulations, everyone!

Japanese Salon canceled due to heavy snow

The first Japanese Salon in 2014 was held on January 12 in Shirakawa, and on January 19 in Fukushima. However, one of the two salon meetings in February was cancelled due to a heavy snow. Neither the members nor the supporters could even get their cars out of the garage and the public transportation was almost paralyzed, so we had to cancel one Japanese Salon meeting.

From March on, we are planning to have Japanese Salon twice a month, where we provide not only support for Japanese language learning but also such programs as hand care workshops and refreshing excursions, which will be a good opportunity to deepen exchange between immigrant women and Japanese women living in Fukushima.

Keiko Maeda (EIWAN Program Coordinator)

Report

Japanese Class Reps Annual Meeting held in Feb.

On February 22, 2014, I attended the annual meeting of Japanese Class Representatives Network organized by Fukushima International Association. Since this was the once-a-year opportunity for the representatives of Japanese classes and schools in Fukushima Prefecture to meet together, participants included those from Hama-dori and Aizu regions as well as the professors of Fukushima University, which has a bipartite agreement on cooperation for Japanese teacher education.

The first part of the meeting was a lecture by Ms. Yoko Haga, Representative of Chikyukko Club

2000 and Asobisha Tenkirin, both of which are a local volunteer group offering multicultural programs and activities in Saitama City. In her lecture, she emphasized that local Japanese salons do not have to aim for Japanese language education because they are not Japanese “schools” and it is more important for them to be a place where Japanese and foreign residents can build a relationship as neighbors in the same community, and a place where foreign residents can feel they belong to. I felt glad to hear this because this is exactly what EIWAN is trying to offer through our Japanese Salon. Ms. Haga also pointed out that teaching Japanese is only part of the support for foreign-born residents to be able to realize their potentials in Japan and another important role of Japanese language supporters is to influence the local community to lower the language barrier for foreign-born residents. I was struck by hearing this because I never thought of this point.

Immigrant women are facing various kinds of difficulties and only a glimpse of which can be seen during the chats with them at Japanese salons. Often at the root of these difficulties lie gender inequality in our society. Therefore, we hope to start building a relationship with other organizations that work on gender-related activities.

Izumi Mizushima (Member of EIWAN Steering Committee)

Supporters wanted !

EIWAN is looking for volunteer supporters who can help us with the Japanese salons, preparation of teaching materials, and translation of various documents. Why not think about child-rearing, family life, and work together with immigrant women?

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