

Habitat Japan Newsletter

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Domestic housing program ‘Project HomeWorks (PHW)’

Due to the spread of COVID-19 and the need to protect human lives, Habitat for Humanity has prioritized the safety of its volunteers and stakeholders by limiting its activities in the past one and a half years while continuing to support its mission of enabling ‘a world where everyone has a decent place to live.’ The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in an economic downturn in Japan, requiring various efforts to maintain people’s lives including securing jobs and housing. However, the welfare programs that are intended to serve as the final safety net to protect minimum living standards are not granted to everyone who apply for them. The extended pandemic situation has brought up many concerns about the increasing number of people experiencing housing losses.

Finding a place to call home: home-finding support

Since becoming registered by the Tokyo district as a Housing Support Organization in 2018, Habitat Japan has continued to provide comprehensive assistance by finding an apartment for those in need (e.g., people with low-income, survivors, the elderly, people with disabilities, people with child support). Habitat Japan provides property information, accompanying house viewings, reviewing legal documents, and moving support, as well as post-move monitoring as needed. Habitat Japan is a member of the Housing First Tokyo Project, a consortium of seven organizations including homeless support and nursing organizations. Through the consortium, services are provided to help support housing search and stable living for those who have experienced home loss or mental illness.



Housing search consultation and property information sharing



Private viewings and reviewing legal documents



Furniture purchase and move support



Post-move support

Finding apartments for many of the people that Habitat supports tends to be challenging and time-consuming. People who are dependent on pension or social welfare typically have limited budgets but affordable properties are scarce. With some realtors, they decline saying that they do not treat any welfare properties.

In order to help provide a basis of livelihood for those in need through finding apartments and move-in support, Habitat leveraged its prior experience to build a network with realtors.

In April 2020, when the first state of emergency was declared, internet cafes were required to close, which resulted in an influx of housing search inquiries from internet cafe refugees. Fast forward one year and housing demand appears to be gradually increasing. In the past six months alone, the number of consultations Habitat received has surpassed the number of consultations received last year, and recently, the age range of inquirers has been spanning from the elderly to the teens.

“Since my former room was located on the 4th floor, I had to take a pause at least four times to get home. That’s why I wanted to move to a place on the first floor,” said Mr. Yamada (pseudonym), who is in his late 60s. He was involved in an accident at work and unable to continue his job because of the trauma. He lost his job and finally he lost his place to live. Since then, he had stayed in several parks in Tokyo and had been homeless for nearly 10 years. One day, he was forced to leave the park and decided to move into a homeless shelter in Tokyo, living on welfare. He got a shelter to sleep and lived there for 7 years. However, his room was on the fourth floor. As the years went and the pain in his legs and back got worse, it got difficult for him to go out from the room. Mr. Yamada now secured a place to call home on the first floor. Habitat continues to support him to build his strength, stability and self-reliance through collaborating with local welfare office.



“Every day was like an obstacle course” shares Ms. Uchida (pseudonym), who is a single mother with a young child. After going through a divorce, the two of them started living in an apartment in Tokyo. The apartment was filled with unpacked boxes for several years after moving in. Although Ms. Uchida wanted to improve the living conditions for her child, her health issues hindered her ability to organize and she decided to reach out to Habitat for help. Two female staff helped Ms. Uchida organize over the course of three visits. Once the apartment was clean, Ms. Uchida told us with a smile, “I now know where things are. With help, I was able to declutter things that I wouldn’t have been able to get rid of by myself.” Due to her continuing health concerns, Ms. Uchida will leverage welfare services to receive livelihood support. The decluttering support helped to enable Ms. Uchida take a step forward in starting a new life with her child.

Protecting existing homes: cleaning and decluttering support

In more than a year after COVID-19 began spreading, ‘Stay Home’ has become an alarm phrase. The alarming situation has continued with Tokyo declaring its third state of emergency in April 2021. While some say that the prolonged self-restraint has weakened the sense of crisis, the elderly and those with illness are continuing to isolate themselves at home as a way to protect themselves. As such, welfare staff are concerned about decreased physical function that can be caused by home isolation. Habitat will continue watching over the elderly.

On another front, Habitat Japan has been able to strengthen the relationship with the child support center in Shinjuku district where the Habitat office is located. As a result, Habitat’s scope has expanded and inquiries from single-parent families have increased. Single mothers often request support from female staff. Since the state of emergency hinders Habitat to mobilize

volunteers, the organization has been assigning female office staff to continue providing support. During the pandemic when people are spending more time than ever at home, we are striving to improve living conditions through clearing and decluttering support so that everyone can live comfortably.



Ripples of giving bring more decent homes

Jefferies

We would like to express our gratitude to the many supporters that joined our 2020 Charity Gala. ‘Project HomeWorks’, Habitat Japan’s domestic housing program, is largely funded by individual and corporate supporters in addition to some government subsidies.

Jefferies Group LLC, the largest independent, global, full-service investment banking firm, has donated to Habitat Japan from a firmwide global effort to raise money in honor of their late chief financial officer Peg Broadbent, who was a victim of the COVID-19. Mr. Takumi Tanaka, managing director of Jefferies Japan says, “All of us at Jefferies have been personally and deeply saddened by the loss of our friend, Peg Broadbent, and we are also concerned about the terrible loss of life and global impact of this pandemic. Jefferies held its Global Coronavirus Relief Charity Day to assist those suffering from the devastation caused by the coronavirus global pandemic. We hope that our donation will help Habitat Japan’s ongoing efforts to provide support in the midst of the coronavirus crisis.”

With the added support from Jefferies, Habitat Japan will be able to continue its efforts to help everyone have safer and more secure home. We are grateful for the support of Jefferies and its employees.

Shelter Repair: Connecting to the future of children

There are facilities around us that protect those who seek security and safety due to the reasons including poverty and domestic violence. For those people, shelter facilities are the basis for regaining a proper life and a place where they can call 'home', even if only temporarily. 'Project HomeWorks' is the Habitat Japan's domestic housing program which tackles housing issues by helping individuals to secure home through home findings and helping them to improve their living condition through cleaning support as well as minor repair. From this spring, Habitat Japan puts more focus on shelter facility repair for children and mothers. Due to the pandemic of the COVID-19, decent home is needed more than ever and we continue to create a world where everyone has a decent place to live.



In partnership with SC Johnson


In partnership with SC Johnson, a global leading manufacturer of household cleaning products, Habitat programs will be implemented in seven locations in the Asia-Pacific region. Habitat Japan has rehabilitated the dormitory at the Yokohama Kunmouin Orphanage, replacing all lights in the dormitory with LED bulbs and upgrading some deteriorated rooms. In addition, Habitat Japan with their support repairs three additional facilities such as shelters for mothers and children to improve the living conditions of those in need.



Outer wall repair at children's home completed

'Ikoi Ryo' in Bott Memorial Home, a children's home in Machida City, Tokyo, is a dormitory for upper grade children. The children live with the facility staff and learn how to be independent. However, the dormitory was built 38 years ago, showing signs of damage, such as peeled off outer wall paint and exposed, bare rebars. Habitat Japan's facility repair ended this spring. Together with the repair, Habitat Japan mobilized three volunteer teams from corporate and campus chapters to clean and reinforce the gutters around the home.

Charity Run 'Home Run 2021' held to support repair of children's home

A large group of people, including children and adults, are participating in a charity run on a paved path outdoors. Many are wearing face masks and athletic gear. The background shows trees and a clear sky.

On April 18 after the state of emergency ended, an in-person version of a week-long virtual charity run 'Home Run 2021' was held at the outer garden of the Imperial Palace. The Home Run 2021 was held for the first time under the COVID-19, with many domestic and international supporters. The day of the in-person run was on a sunny weekend after the state of emergency was lifted, a total of more than 100 runners and walkers, from children to adults, participated in this event. Safety and health protocols were followed. Thanks to the support from families of the participants and 32 student-volunteers who helped the management of the event, all the participants were able to complete each menu without any accidents or injuries. Ms. Habano who ran the longest distance during the Home Run shared, "While thinking about my own children that I raised, I ran also thinking about what I could do for other children who need support". She told us that Habitat Home Run was a chance for her to step out to take action for children. We would like to thank around 300 runners and walkers who participated in the event virtually and in-person, and the sponsors who donated for the participants.

Responding to the COVID-19 Crisis in India, Indonesia and Cambodia

Because of the COVID-19 global pandemic, Habitat for Humanity has suspended the Global Village program, Habitat's overseas building volunteer program. The countries Habitat supports in the Asia-Pacific region, where Habitat Japan usually sends almost 1,500 volunteers a year, have been affected by the shortage of volunteers, as well as the reduction of funds for their initiatives. However, now more than ever, people are facing a housing crisis and Habitat needs continued support to keep serving those who are in need of safe and decent homes to strengthen their resilience. Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, some national organizations have responded to the crisis by finding ways to build safe and decent homes.



Habitat for Humanity Cambodia

In Cambodia, which is popular among our volunteers, Habitat aims to enhance the urban community's resilience against the risks of disasters and infectious diseases, such as COVID-19, through the Urban Resiliency Project. As part of the project, Habitat Cambodia has assisted 2,381 families living in 15 informal settlement communities by distributing COVID-19 prevention kits and raising awareness on preventive measures. Various interventions, such as accessing safe water and sanitation and raising awareness on land law and housing-related policies, were also conducted.

Habitat for Humanity India

It has been said that the COVID-19 pandemic has pushed another 230 million Indians into poverty and has laid bare the extent of the housing crisis. In the past year, Habitat India has served over 1.32 million people through their Road to Recovery COVID-19 response by providing vulnerable families, migrant workers, and frontline workers with hygiene kits, family essential kits, conditional cash transfer. They have also implemented behaviour change communication activities and built Habitat Care Centers. HCC is a unique public-private-people's partnership facilitated by Habitat India to respond to the rising COVID-19 cases in India. HCCs serve as a tool to safely isolate people, especially those who are not able to follow physical distancing norms or are living in crowded urban slums. Habitat India has set up 16 Care Centers with an aggregate capacity of 1,975 beds.



Habitat for Humanity Indonesia

In the three months following March 2020, the number of patients infected with COVID-19 in Indonesia increased to more than 56,000 people, including health workers. While health workers battled with the virus every day to save lives, they also had to bear the stigma of contracting COVID-19 and sometimes even faced rejection when returning to their homes due to the fear of spreading the virus to their loved ones and neighbors. Because of this, some were forced to rest in the hospital by maximizing the makeshift facilities. By providing hotel rooms as temporary shelter, Habitat Indonesia helped more than 1,821 health workers from 12 hospitals last year.



Voice from a family in India

Jayanthi Ravi Das who resides in Bengaluru said, "My 3-year-old daughter Aparna was diagnosed with cancer a year ago. Thankfully, she is responding well to the treatment. My husband Pinto and I have spent more than 3 lakhs (USD4,100) on her treatment. So, every support counts. We are grateful for the family essentials kits we received in this difficult time in our lives." Distributing family essentials kits to vulnerable families is part of Habitat's response to the COVID-19 risks in India.

Habitat for Humanity partnered with colleagues from Barclays across Asia Pacific in response to the COVID-19 emergency situation in India. Barclays matched the donations made by colleagues resulting in more than 1.3 million yen to Habitat for Humanity Japan alone. Habitat for Humanity is grateful for the support received.



Habitat Young Leaders Build 2021

'Habitat Young Leaders Build (HYLB)', which is the annual youth campaign, was held from International Volunteer Day on December 5, 2020 to late April of 2021. HYLB is one of the largest youth campaigns in the Asia-Pacific region joined by 16 countries and one region.

Aligned with this campaign, Habitat campus chapters in Japan usually hold youth camps and a nationwide fundraising event, and volunteer in overseas and domestic housing through 'Global Village' and 'Project HomeWorks' programs. In addition, each campus chapter participates in community volunteer work where their campus is located.

However, because of the COVID-19 global pandemic, most of the campus chapters were not allowed to conduct face-to-face activities due to school guidelines. In addition, Habitat Japan was unable to create opportunities for the campus chapter members to volunteer in Japan and overseas in light of safety concerns for the homeowners and volunteers. However, the youth kept trying to look for ways where they can contribute rather than just waiting for the situation to get back to the way they were. The campus chapter members organized online GV debriefing sessions, and created an opportunity to share their experience with younger chapter members who had never participated in GV. They continued to share what role the youth can fulfill as a member of Habitat's campus chapters in realizing a vision of a world where everyone has a decent place to live. Habitat held a region-wide online conference called 'Youth from Home for Homes,' as part of the organization's continuous effort to engage youth in raising awareness on shelter-related problems and driving youth-led solutions. Five representative students from Japan participated in the conference.



Accommodate the changes and continue to challenge

Written by Kinoshita Ami, Representative of Eco-Habitat Kwansei Gakuin



We, Eco-Habitat Kwansei Gakuin, a campus chapter based at Kwansei Gakuin University Mita Campus, are marking our 27th anniversary this year. Currently (as of May 22), we have a total of 106 members. Since the COVID-19 outbreak, we were forced to suspend our regular activities, such as having face-to-face meetings, organizing fundraising events, and joining the Global Village program as volunteers. However, in this situation, we could not just sit back. To accommodate the new normal brought by the COVID-19 and continue our mission, we changed our old ways of doing things.

We organized our regular meetings online through Zoom. It was a new challenge and we faced many difficulties. But there were opportunities that presented themselves. One was that it allowed us to invite other chapter members and it gave us opportunities to meet. There were also other things we could continue even though we switched from in-person to virtual. We conducted our annual project last summer, and we needed to collaborate, organize and implement it with first- and second-grade members. The theme of the project was "Homelessness", which included sessions to learn the issues, organize donated items, and conduct an online workshop with high school student participants. All preparations were done online and underwent many difficulties. In the end, the participants learned more about the housing issues and were satisfied with the project. We also organized and held our annual Tohoku Study Tour virtually last November. Not only did the



team prepare the content for quizzes that could help deepen their knowledge about disaster preparedness; but we also invited a speaker from Tohoku who had experienced the disaster. This spring, we hosted a virtual annual joint two-day campus chapter camp in Western Japan. More than 100 members from the campus chapters across the nation joined. Through those initiatives, we were able to engage with one another and remain united in our belief that everyone deserves a safe, decent place to live.

I try to keep in mind that we need to adapt to the changes and continue to overcome challenges. It is important for me to understand the expectation of chapter members and seek ways on how we can continue our mission as a chapter. While we prepare for the day when we can volunteer together, we also continue to explore what we can do now and challenge ourselves to fulfill our mission as a campus chapter.