

Habitat Japan Newsletter



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On February 24, Russia invaded Ukraine, resulting in millions of Ukrainians seeking refuge in neighboring countries, including Poland, Romania, and Hungary. Habitat for Humanity, which has extensive experience in Central and Eastern Europe, quickly mobilized to secure shelter for displaced families, mostly women, children, and the elderly.

ON THE MOVE

up to 2 weeks

Emergency accommodation



BUILDING STABILITY

up to 6 months

Interim shelter solutions



Our response has included supplying refugees with emergency travel kits and electric heaters for those temporarily housed in mobile camps along two major Romanian borders. We also partnered with hotels and serviced apartments to secure short-term accommodations. In Poland, we set up a housing kiosk at Warsaw's central transit station to help refugees find hotels and hostels in which to stay.

We secured mid-term accommodations for refugees by matching them with families who opened their homes to displaced Ukrainians. Additionally, we subsidized the rental and refurbishing of dormitories. We also donated furniture to host families and partner organizations operating the dormitories.

LONG TERM SHELTER

6 months+

Housing solutions

The Pathways to Permanence strategy helps displaced families find lasting solutions to their housing needs. We are lending our construction and housing expertise to local governments and other partners in Poland to repurpose empty spaces to serve as shelters and to facilitate other mid- and long-term housing solutions.

Marina's Story: Recounting Why She and Her Daughters Left Ukraine

Marina and her two daughters fled their home in Ukraine to seek refuge in Poland. Habitat for Humanity supported the family by finding accommodations for them.

Loud explosions jolted Marina and her husband awake before dawn outside their home in the central Ukrainian city of Dnipro. Bombs hit an airport just five kilometers away. "We couldn't even believe this was a war!" exclaimed Marina. The nearby bombings continued, and every air raid siren caused the family to take cover in the hallway of their vulnerable apartment block. The couple decided that Marina and the children would need to evacuate while the husband remained to continue his job as an industrial engineer. "We were looking for a safe place because, well, like all mothers who are taking their children away, they simply worry and want their children to stay alive," recalled Marina.

First, they headed to the city of Lviv, then to a smaller town farther west. Along the way, she heard from a friend that there was a Habitat for Humanity housing help desk at the Warsaw East transit station, so they made their way there. Marina and her daughters now live in an apartment where the owner has guaranteed they can stay for at least six months.

Marina recounts the moment she entered her new apartment. "It seemed to us that here was a place where we can now sleep in peace, without being woken by sirens in the middle of the night, without having to sit in the hallway for three hours in a row. My children had a good night's sleep for the first time. We felt that we had finally found a home. This is some miracle, how my friends found this organization, Habitat."



Facility Repair

Despite the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, Japan is encouraging the resumption of normal activities to stimulate the economy and improve general well-being. However, such measures leave residents of welfare facilities vulnerable to Covid-19 infections. In these communities, social events are resuming to combat isolation and reinstate a physical support system while maintaining active preventive health measures. Habitat for Humanity's facility repair program responds to the urgent repair needs of aging facilities that serve as homes and communal spaces for disadvantaged segments of the population with pandemic mitigation in facility improvement designs.

Orphanage Repair: Build A Better Future For Children Through Shelter

SC Johnson's ongoing support has enabled improvements in four facilities in Yokohama, Kanagawa Prefecture's most populous city. The projects include continued repairs to an aging and dated orphanage for children with disabilities. In addition to dormitory repairs completed last year, they recently refitted the doors in all rooms and retrofitted wash basins to provide hot running water for each floor of the four-story building. The children had only been allowed to use cold water even in the winter out of caution. Mixers were added to safely provide hot and cold water, encouraging hand washing and making it a more comfortable experience.



Community Space Repair: A Place To Empower The Community

The fourth district of the Nishi Ward in Yokohama comprises 14 residential associations with 5,000 residents and provides a center designed to provide community services and social activities. These events include monthly welfare meetings led by association leaders, holiday celebrations, a sports day, and gatherings such as the Minna no Shokudou communal meal event. However, the building is old and lacked necessary amenities. One example was the Japanese-style lavatory, which needed a proper division between women's and men's sections. A lock was placed on the door to assure women's privacy, but some remained hesitant and continued to use a toilet in a nearby convenience store. To provide private male and female sections, Habitat expanded the toilet by incorporating the space of a little-used adjacent kitchen. With help from SC Johnson volunteers, we painted the corridor wall leading to the restroom and installed new window screens. Representatives of the center had this to say about the work, "We are delighted that the toilet is renovated. We wanted to show our gratitude," as they shared handmade sweets and coffee with volunteers.

Together With Corporate Volunteers, We Build Safer and Secure Homes For Children

This spring, we resumed on-site work and welcomed the involvement of corporate volunteers. Bloomberg L.P., a long-term supporter of Habitat for Humanity, has continued to financially facilitate our domestic facility repair and Project HomeWorks programs. In addition, this May and June, twenty Bloomberg volunteers worked on two facilities and two households, the first direct involvement since the start of the pandemic. The support included repairing one room in a shelter for mothers and children in Kanagawa Prefecture. Volunteers replaced damaged wall coverings with new, brighter, and more colorful wallpaper for an area dedicated to after-school child care. Improving the room's ambiance was essential to maintaining social distancing by stimulating indoor play.



Securing basic housing for the elderly, people with disabilities, and low-income families is one of Japan's key social issues. Project HomeWorks, our domestic initiative, addresses this issue by providing housing search and home cleaning/decluttering support. A recent meeting with social services entities revealed that elderly inquiries to their service hotline have increased significantly. This rise reflects a willingness for senior citizens to socially reconnect as the COVID-19 situation improves. To respond to inquiries as timely as possible, Habitat will continue partnering with volunteers to provide the needed services.

Home Partner Story: Overcoming the Stigma Surrounding Social Welfare

Social welfare is the right of every Japanese citizen. It provides a safety net by helping individuals and families in need to secure a livelihood, shelter, food, and clothing. However, some resist receiving assistance and continue living under prolonged hardship. This unwillingness is primarily due to the stigma of receiving welfare as well as a reluctance to reveal their situation to family members. Mr. Matsumoto (pseudonym) is one such example.

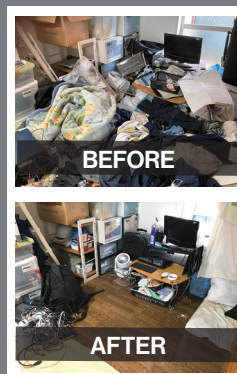
Mr. Matsumoto was a long-time street vendor who could not afford to rent a home. As a result, he lived in capsule hotels, internet cafes, and even on the streets until he fell ill and was hospitalized. After being discharged from the hospital, he was required to make regular doctor's visits. Paying his medical bills was an insurmountable burden for someone who could barely get by. Mr. Matsumoto was encouraged to seek social welfare, which provides medical aid. Despite his reluctance to do so, he decided to receive such assistance and temporarily moved into a shelter for vulnerable individuals. Habitat received a request from the support organization to help with the search for his new home. Transitioning from the

shelter to an apartment took more time than anticipated as it required a copy of his most current residence certificate. Since Mr. Matsumoto frequently changed his address, his residence certificate was difficult to locate, and he eventually found out that it had expired. He then attempted to apply for a new residence certificate but couldn't provide a permanent address. Habitat sought help at the lawyers from Houterasu, a legal support center, to file a request with the family court to create his family registry, which took five months.

We met Mr. Matsumoto after he finally moved into a new apartment. He greeted us and told us that he is still getting used to the change but is slowly adjusting. For someone who used a smartphone for the first time, the process of applying for a family registry and residence certificate was challenging; he may have given up and lost access to medical care if he had to handle it on his own. To help secure stable living conditions for as many people as possible, Habitat will continue providing housing support.

Home Partner Story: Providing Social Services for Specific Needs

Mr. Suda (pseudonym) has Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and has difficulty dealing with day-to-day tasks. He was forced to move out of his last home when his unkempt room upset neighbors. He tried maintaining the cleanliness and organization of his new home, telling Habitat, "I want to keep my home clean so that I don't get kicked out again.". Unfortunately, he only succeeded for a few months. Once, he even hired a professional cleaner, but the cost was too high. He consulted his local welfare group for assistance, but was told that other people are able to clean up after themselves. Mr. Suda did not give up searching for help, and when he approached Habitat Japan, we were able to provide the cleaning and decluttering support he needed. He is now determined to continue utilizing welfare services to maintain a safe and comfortable living environment.



Barclays' Community Aid Package has supported vulnerable communities affected globally by the COVID-19 pandemic. Barclays' important contribution has aided our Facility Repair program and the Project HomeWorks initiative. Additionally, they have funded our efforts to make living spaces safer and more hygienic by distributing home equipment and furniture. Most recently, Barclays' partnership has served the Tsukuroi Tokyo Fund and TENOHASI, charitable organizations which provide shelter and support to those who have lost their homes. Disaster can strike anywhere and at any time so preparation is vital. To aid their initiatives, we distributed 40 sets of emergency kits, consisting of first-aid supplies, emergency toilets, and potable water.



Continued Support for Housing Construction in Indonesia from Japan

Habitat for Humanity's Global Village (GV) program sends volunteers across the globe for short-term construction projects. One of Habitat Japan's primary service areas is the Special Region of Yogyakarta in Indonesia. 707 GV volunteers from Japan assisted in building homes for 81 families in Selopamiro Village from 2015 to 2019. Campus Chapter student groups also assisted in the construction of two community centers supporting 276 families.

Need for Adequate Homes for 226 Households in Tuksono

Following the success of the Selopamiro project, we began work in Tuksono, a village troubled by one of the highest poverty rates in the province. 8,500 people inhabit this small village of 2,700 households, 44% of whom are experiencing poverty. Many families live in poorly constructed houses without access to hygienic toilets or potable water, one of the factors causing many children to experience impaired growth and development. To improve living conditions, we launched a project to build 226 homes in 2020. Due to the prolonged impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, we halted work after completing the nineteenth home and postponed the resumption of the GV program.

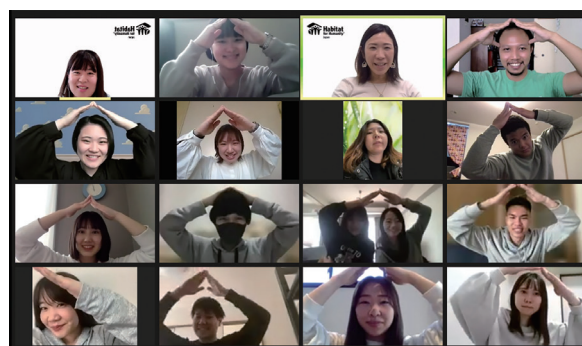


Create a Better Future for Children through Shelter

While GV trips were suspended, we launched the first-ever virtual GV program with students in the Habitat Club at the American School in Japan (ASIJ) and local Habitat staff in Indonesia. The program included selecting a family to receive aid, assessing the family's needs in relation to those of the village, and observing the home's construction through videos taken on-site. The club ultimately selected Ms. Juniati, a single parent of two children, as the beneficiary. The process of building the home was conducted through regular virtual sessions and included discussions with the Indonesian staff and a Q&A with Ms. Juniati. After moving into their new home, the family gave thanks in a video message, with Ms. Juniati explaining, "I felt happy since I knew that I could have a home. I don't know how to express my gratitude."

Held First Virtual GV Reunion

In March, nearly 60 volunteers from the GV program in Selopamiro gathered for a virtual GV reunion to share their achievements and connect with the homeowners they helped in the village. They also discussed the current efforts in Tuksono, where families are still in need of safe homes. One volunteer said, "I was very happy to meet my homeowner for the first time in two years, and it brought tears to my eyes when I found out how they are still thinking of us." Another said, "I realized for the first time how the home building activity contributed significantly to the community."



<Completion Image of the Facility>



Project Launched to Protect the Health of All

One major challenge facing Tuksono is the lack of access to health services. Inadequate housing, poor hygiene, and insufficient maternal nutrition are causing many children in the village to experience stunted growth. The village does not have a dedicated health service facility to monitor the health of pregnant women, a situation that contributes to the prevalence of impaired child growth and development. We responded by raising funds through our GV reunion and annual charity gala held in April. Those funds are being used to build a facility with the necessary equipment for local health workers to perform medical examinations. Thanks to your support, we began construction of the facility at the end of June.



Between Autumn 2021 and Spring 2022, Habitat for Humanity Japan conducted five "Community Development" tours to Tamba City in Hyogo Prefecture for its Campus Chapter members. Forty students joined us to learn how social issues, such as aging and depopulation, exacerbate fiscal pressures in small- and medium-sized regional communities, such as Tamba city. The tours, funded by the Sekisui House Matching Program, included learning about community efforts to welcome new residents through various support initiatives such as providing generous subsidies to renovate old, vacant houses. The students reflected on the trip and explained how they gained a more holistic view of housing problems in Japan. Some students also found it to be an important opportunity to connect with the people of Tamba City and other Campus Chapter members.

Interview with a Teacher who Inspired Students with her Dedication to Habitat for Humanity

The American School in Japan's student-led Habitat Club has contributed significantly to our overseas building programs. The club's success is owed mainly to the students' enthusiasm and their lead advisor's enduring commitment to the organization. When Ms. Sandy Blodgett began teaching at ASIJ 15 years ago, she was naturally drawn to the Habitat Club's mission. She agreed to sponsor the club after recalling her mother's sentiments while growing up in Ecuador, "Only after satisfying one of the most basic human physiological needs of having shelter can one concentrate on education and hold a steady job."

Her long-standing dedication to safe and affordable housing led her to oversee ten Global Village teams in eight countries, totaling over 400 students. In addition to preparing the necessary paperwork and communicating with parents, Sandy's responsibility for student well-being on GV trips led her to encounter many challenges. "Teachers become the parents of 22-30 teenagers at once!" exclaimed Sandy. "Before each trip, I always prayed for everyone to return home healthy, happy, and proud of doing a good job."

Sandy recalled her unique experiences abroad and shared how she saw her students mature due to the GV program. "All GV trips have been unforgettable and incredible for different reasons. In Bali, we worked with three widows on their build-sites. In Fiji, it was a daily occurrence to have

Fijian kids working with us in the afternoons; they were all so friendly. The generosity of the Sri Lankan people will not be forgotten; one day, I mentioned I like coconuts, and two days later, we got them. In Vietnam, we laid the brick for two houses, and students were amazed at the difficulty of this work and the kindness of the skilled workers who patiently guided us." In addition, she told us how rewarding the experience of escorting the students on the GV trips has been. "Participating in GV projects in other countries gives ASIJ students an opportunity to experience kindness, generosity, and happiness at a different level than they are used to," Sandy said. "The interactions with the homeowner families help the students realize that we all are human beings and have the same needs, hopes, dreams, and wants. This leads to more empathic, tolerant, and compassionate students, who, in time, will make this a better world."

Sandy has since retired to seek new adventures. Habitat for Humanity is indebted to her for her dedication to helping the vulnerable find safe and decent places to live. Her contagious spirit and philanthropic heart will continue to inspire those around her.

