

CWAJ VVI (Volunteers for the Visually Impaired) Newsletter 2011 Summer Edition

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1. Invitation to the Hands-on-Art at CWAJ Print Show

This year, the CWAJ Print Show will be held at the newly renovated Tokyo American Club. As part of the Print Show, Hands-on-Art will also be held. Hands-on-Art is a special art program specifically designed for the visually impaired, so that they can also enjoy the art. Escort from Kamiya-cho station to the venue, an explanation of prints, and a guiding escort inside the venue will be provided by volunteer guides. So that we can organize the necessary volunteers, we request that you please make requests for guides in advance.

*Venue: Tokyo American Club (Minato-ku Azabudai 2-1-2)

*Opening period: Friday, October 14th 11:00-20:00

Saturday, October 15th 11:00-18:00

Sunday, October 16th 11:00-17:00

*Admission free

*The due date for volunteer guide requests from Kamiya-cho station on the Tokyo Metro Hibiya Line is October 2nd.

*Inquiry about Hands-on-Art: VolunteersVI@cwaj.org

For further information, please refer to the CWAJ web site <http://www.cwaj.org>, where information will be available in Japanese and English from the end of August. A map to the Tokyo American club will be provided.

2. CWAJ SVI Scholars 2011

CWAJ Scholarship for the Visually Impaired to Study Abroad

¥2 million

Fukuchi Kentaro

Bachelor of Human Science, University of Tsukuba

Study Program: MA in International Education and Development, University of Sussex

Mr. Fukuchi has studied international education and development focusing on inclusive education. Privately, he has supported education for children with disabilities in Sudan with his organization, The Committee for Assisting and Promoting Education of the Disabled in Sudan. In his master's program, he will develop his understanding of international education and development as well as learning various research skills which will enable him to contribute to international efforts to make education accessible to everyone, including children with disabilities and other marginalized groups.

CWAJ Scholarship for the Visually Impaired to Study in Japan

¥2 million

Misono Masamitsu

BA, Sociology, School of Social Welfare, Shukutoku University

MS, Special Education, University of Tsukuba

Study Program: PhD, Life-long Human Sciences, Tokyo Women's Christian University

Mr. Misono lost his sight completely at the age of nine. He has found that in this age of information, difficulty in accessing information from images creates serious barriers for people with visual impairment. He is researching presentation methods for the expression of figures and charts in tactile patterns of two dimensions. He will employ evidence from cognitive psychology to determine the best arrangements for the patterns. His hope is to help disabled people in having barrier-free access to information in the future.

3. Information of 2012 Scholarship Application for the Visually Impaired Students

CWAJ is now accepting applications for 2012 scholarship students, one for a domestic scholarship, and one for a scholarship abroad. For application details, please access the CWAJ web site or send an email to Scholarship@cwaj.org.

Domestic: <http://www.cwaj.org/Scholarship/svi-sj.htm>

Abroad: <http://www.cwaj.org/Scholarship/svi-sa.htm>

4. Report on the April English Conversation Gathering (ECG)

The first English Conversation Gathering (ECG) for 2011 was held on April 9th from 10am at the Iris Women's Center located in Shibuya. Along with other major cancellations, the Committee considered canceling this ECG due to the triple disaster in the Tohoku region on March 11; however, since many VIs showed interest in holding the ECG despite the unstable situation, it was held as scheduled although the date was changed from a Friday evening to a Saturday morning.

Twenty VIs and 25 CWAJ volunteers attended. The theme was on the country of Senegal located on the African continent. Sata Sek, a CWAJ member from Senegal, introduced her country at this ECG in her refined, brightly colored native costume. She explained that Senegal has a multitude of different cultures and has given birth to many famous singers and designers. Senegal is therefore one of the leading countries in West African music and fashion. It also is proud of the Paris-Dakar International Car Race and the Pink Lake, both of which attract many tourists.

All the attendees were fascinated with the talk which resulted in a lively Q & A session.

5. Introduction of Cea Mari, a Picture Book Author

A visually impaired friend who has been becoming increasingly active and popular in various places, recently participated along with her close friend in the ECG. They are Cea Mari and her seeing-eye dog, Frill.

Since Mari has been losing her sight rapidly for several years now, she no longer continues to work as a dye artist. When she was about to lose her desire to live, with no hope, her heart awash in darkness, she met a seeing-eye dog, Frill.

As a result of her own experience, Mari has started to think that she would like to convey a message to other people who have lost their desire to live. It is the message to have courage, to not give up, and to take a step forward. This has led her to write a picture book, "Seeing-Eye Dog, Frifri and Mari".

The story is set in Okinawa, where Mari and Frill actually visited. Nao Watanabe, a singer songwriter touched by the picture book, composed a song for which Mari wrote the lyrics, creating a warm, rhythmical song called “Fri Fri Fureba” that further conveys Mari’s thoughts. Mari, Ms. Watanabe, and Frill continue to send a message to those who have been suffering from the March 11th earthquake disaster and have felt lonely since then. They hope they can encourage those people, even if it’s just a little.

6. Essay by a Former Exchange Student Contribution from Korea

The year before last, Ms. I, a very congenial young lady, was a member of the Foreign Students Circle (FSC) in CWAJ. She is currently working in a major company in Korea and is leading a very busy life that includes many business trips abroad.

Communicating with Disabled Children through Animals

I Jon Won

Since last year, as part of the social welfare program in my company I have been participating in “Sai Katsu Jouba” (Rehabilitation through Horseback Riding).

“Sai Katsu Jouba” is a therapeutic program for children who suffer from some form of paralysis. The children are taught to do certain exercises on the horse (or “pony”, a special breed of small-sized horses) and/or to ride the horse to stimulate the paralyzed muscles to move again.

This activity requires three volunteers, one to lead the horse and the other two to prevent the child from falling by supporting the child’s legs on both sides of the horse. I first joined this group due to my love of horses. However, as time passed, I realized that assisting the child to exercise on the horse was far more important than my love of horses.

In the beginning, I was not particularly fond of interacting with children as they were rowdy and sometimes they would not listen to me. But after interacting with the children on numerous occasions, I came to realize that the children were acting waywardly due to a mixture of emotions: their frustration of not being able to move according to their free will because of their paralysis and the joy of having this new

experience of riding horses.

Perhaps the children wished to communicate with us through the horses. Through assisting the same child in the program, I was able to elicit laughter and conversation by discussing the feelings and expressions of the horse this child rode. This child told me that he was able to increase the number of friends he made in school by discussing topics about the horse with his peers. I believe that the horizon of this child's world expanded due to the therapy he received through "Sai Katsu Jouba". I also believe that I personally profited from my experience since the physical and mental fatigue I felt seemed to dissipate as I communicated with the child.

"Sai Katsu Jouba" is a universally famous rehabilitation program. In Europe, the US and Australia, the environment makes it easy to execute such programs; however, in Korea there are only two places aside from the company where I work where such a program can be found. If I had not joined this company, I would not have been aware that such a program existed. There are people who doubt the validity of such a program, but there have been confirmed cases where children successfully began to walk after participating in this program.

I sincerely hope that more people will become aware of the program "Sai Katsu Jouba" through this essay.

7. Essay by a Graduate from JVDVCB

Mr. Chikasa Komazawa is a graduate of Japan Vocational Development Center for the Blind (JDVCB) this year, and as of April, he has been working as an instructor at the center. He teaches PC skills such as Word, Excel, and basic knowledge of Windows.

The Inner Meaning of Communication

Chikasa Komazawa

Since last March, I have been involved in an event called "Dialog in the Dark" (DID). This is an activity that takes place in total darkness that our eyes can't adjust to, in order to help us have various experiences using all our senses except for sight. I have felt in my everyday life what it is like to encounter various kinds of barriers that a visually impaired person faces. I can't see people's expressions. I don't know about the greenness of trees, the colorfulness of flowers, or the color of the sky and the sea.

What would happen to sighted people if they were to suddenly lose their sight? Such a simple question and curiosity made me participate in DID.

Inside the DID venue, you can touch and play in nature, taste beverages and food, and experience the sound of rain or wind in the darkness. At first, the guests are tense and quite scared in the dark, and then they begin to feel safe and reassured by uttering words and touching each other, and finally, most of them enjoy themselves with a smile.

The warm feeling of the bark they touch,

The cool feeling of refreshing water,

The nose-tickling smell of flowers and soil,

The reassuring and gentle voice of a companion,

The feeling of quenching the throat with a beverage the sensation of which is all the more striking when we are not distracted by our sense of sight.

We often hear the following remarks after the various experiences:

“To be unable to see is not scary at all.”

“To be unable to see is rich enough as it is.”

People tend to have many misunderstandings and to discriminate because of prejudices such as, “The darkness is scary,” or “It is a pity not to be able to see.” The darkness in DID might break such prejudices and create communication that goes beyond age, gender, race, and disability.

It is very difficult to communicate with others. I have had many cases where due to a simple communication gap, I broke a relationship with people who were important to me. My present self is feeling that my communication with the guests in DID is guiding me back to a place, or to an awareness, with which I originally started and then forgot. Although I have been involved in DID for only two months, I have noticed one great thing, which is that the feeling that the darkness brings us is not so special after all. If we close our eyes, the darkness is there. Although we feel our sense of touch, smell, taste and hearing become keen, in fact, we originally had them from the beginning. The true, important thing is to make people aware that as human beings, when we close our eyes, we are not different. There is no barrier between us. I feel that true communication is something like having that understanding.

The unprecedented disaster we had this past March damaged the supply of electricity, leaving many people afraid in the darkness. I believe this was a time when we had

true communication by calling out to each other and joining hands together. I try to be involved in DID in order to help my awareness return to its original color, since it sometimes becomes impure or unclear. And with my abundant senses, I would like to fully experience the smell of sprouting trees, skin-sunburned summer sunshine, the sound of autumn leaves underfoot, and the warmth of human skin in winter--and to share these sensations with many people. I believe this is true communication.

8. Editorial Postscript

Thousands of lives and livelihoods were instantly annihilated by the massive earthquake that lasted only a few minutes triggering a monstrous killer tsunami which destroyed much of the shoreline of NE Japan. The damage at the Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant caused the entire world to shudder from fear, resulting in governments demanding a complete review of nuclear energy policies on an international scale. We sincerely believe that it is of infinite importance that we focus on the victims and continue to assist them to help reconstruct their destroyed lives.

Did you enjoy the summer issue of the VI Newsletter? The contribution from Korea by I Jon Won about her experience of volunteering for disabled children through therapy with horses was both unique and heartwarming. One VI friend shared his profound and moving experience which he received through his activities in Dialogue in the Dark.

I believe that what hinders communication between people is the wall which we subconsciously erect creating a silent distance between us, as well as a strong sense of apathy we seem to grow.

For the reader, I sincerely hope that the articles within this issue have resonated within your soul as they have done to mine as Editor.

I sincerely hope that you will send in your opinions and comments to the following address. Also if you wish to receive the VVI Newsletter on your PC, please email us at the same address below:

Contact email: VolunteersVI@cwaj.org

Editor: Toshiko Yazaki