

JK Division of Sabae City Government

Sabae City



Background

In Sabae City, the “Sabae Ordinance to Promote Community Development Through Civic Activities” (established in August 2003) and the “Sabae Ordinance for Initiatives of Citizens” (established in March 2010) were created at the citizens’ suggestion. The city promotes community development through the “initiatives of citizens” and “civic collaboration” from the early stages, aiming for participatory community development by allowing citizens to take the lead in community development and not just be customers of administrative services.

Meanwhile, about 30% of secondary school graduates in Fukui Prefecture move away to attend college or for employment, and only a little under 10% of them later return. In particular, the number of women who return to the prefecture has decreased by half over 10 years. The population of Sabae City also has a significantly declining under-20 age bracket. In order to overcome these problems of a declining population and create a sustainable community, the issue has been to improve the environment so that young people, especially young women, can stay in their local communities.

Purpose of Project

To organize a community development team centered on female secondary school pupils who have rarely participated in community development and are regarded as being furthest from the administration. The aim is to create a community model for new civic collaboration in which young people and women are willing to participate in administration through carrying out self-planned community activities.

Outline of Project

In April 2014, the community development project “JK Division of Sabae City Government” (*) was set up with female secondary school pupils either living or going to school in Sabae City as members. There were 13 participants in FY2014, 16 in FY2015, and 25 in FY2016. They worked on self-planned volunteer activities and events as well as collaboration projects with different groups (of adults).

Their main activities number more than 20 per year, including: 1) “Pikapika Plan,” fun volunteer cleaning with lots of young participants, 2) development of the application “Sabota” which makes it possible to browse online the latest information on library study space vacancies, 3) creation of Sabae’s own sweets, and 4) the National Community Development Summit for secondary school pupils.



JK Division 2016 original sweets selection meeting



JK Division “Pikapika Plan” ~ Picking up rubbish on Halloween

Progress and Achievements

The ideas formulated at the beginning of this project are shown below.

- 1) Don't set “goals and results” in advance but respect the secondary school pupils' own ideas and “fun and looseness” above all.
- 2) Adults must not provide education or guidance but devote themselves to supporting the girls
- 3) The aim is not to change the pupils but to change the values and common practices of the government and the concerned adults.

These perspectives helped to bring out a lot of the members' unconventional ideas, motivations and actions, which resulted in achieving the “unexpected results” mentioned above.

Effects of Project

The secondary school pupil project members have actively worked on as many as 80 projects every year. Of the 11 graduate members, 10 set up a group of young people involving male students called “SAN” and participated in the municipal “Civic Collaboration Promotion Conference” in order to continuously carry out their own activities.

In addition, the JK Division's activities have spontaneously produced support groups in the city, such as a group of young pastry chefs and a group of IT firm managers. Moreover, women in their 40-50s living in the city, not to be outdone by the JK Division, set up the OC Division (Oba-chan or Auntie) and have been

carrying out activities voluntarily. In this way, opportunities for citizens to participate in community development have been enhanced unprecedentedly.

“If youths change, then adults will change. If adults change, then communities will change.” The youths who realise this consider community development not as the affairs of other people, but as their own affairs. This kind of virtuous cycle is now being created.

Problems and Responses

Because the government working together with female secondary school pupils was a novelty and caused somewhat of a news frenzy, media reporting on this project was a little overheated before its formal start. Therefore, the parties concerned at the schools and the board of education worried about protecting the members' privacy, and the project ideals that “the secondary school pupils' ideas have to be respected” and that “adults must not provide education or guidance,” and so the city government made repeated, careful prior adjustments and explanations.

As a response, activity guidelines were formulated in the preparatory stage to create a framework to consider privacy protection and security during the activities while respecting the will of the members and their families.



National Community Development Summit for secondary school students

Outlook

New observations and challenges identified through this project are shown below.

- 1) Adults may assume that young people including female secondary school pupils are indifferent to administration, community activities and their “hometown” (and therefore they long for urban life).
- 2) By providing a “place and chance” for young people and by having the courage to leave the matter to them, they can take the lead in their own way.
- 3) It is important for adults in local communities to break illusions such as “What on earth can secondary school pupils do?” and “Youngsters don’t care about anything,” and come face-to-face with individual youths who have always been around adults but have been pushed out of view.

Of those listed above, the final point 3) is the most important. When adults turn away from young people, young people cannot feel any attraction or attachment to their “hometown.”

Currently in Japan, triggered by the amendment to the Public Offices Election Act to lower the voting age from 20 to 18, sovereign education and political participation of young people has been on the agenda. In that case, the challenge facing each of us is to come up with answers to the following two questions: does the politics and community development conducted by adults contain content and substance that can attract the interest of young people; and have adults, who are responsible for the future of young people, been able to offer them hope and vision?

Reference URL

<http://www.city.sabae.fukui.jp/pageview.html?id=1452>

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(Japanese only)

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Meaning of Terminology/Coined Words Used in this Report

* “JK” is an abbreviation of Joshi Kokosei which means female secondary school pupils. This type of word, abbreviated Japanese words written in Roman characters, is used by the young as slang understandable only to their peers when chatting etc.