

Support for Children with Developmental Disabilities and the Development of a City in Japan based on UNICEF's Child-Friendly Cities Model

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# 日本における発達障がいのある子ども支援とまちづくり

— UNICEF「子どもにやさしいまち」モデルに基づいて —

## Support for Children with Developmental Disabilities and the Development of a City in Japan based on UNICEF's Child-Friendly Cities Model

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This study examined issues in building a city which is friendly to children with developmental disabilities in Japan based on a “Child-Friendly Cities” model launched by UNICEF, by discussing practices of Japanese communities.

In the communities in Japan, the following projects are expected to be implemented: development of human resources, parenting support, enhancement of a system to provide medical and educational support for children with disabilities, employment support, and improvement and management of a support promotion center. UNICEF, on the other hand, encourages to ensure “legal systems”, “children’s plan”, “institutional framework”, “evaluation”, “budget”, “analysis”, “making children’s rights known”, “advocacy”, and “children’s participation” in the community.

In order to build a city which is friendly to children with developmental disabilities, it is required to take measures to tackle agendas, “developing systems for fulfilling comprehensive and sustainable support”, “fulfilling children’s rights to participation”, and “improving legal systems for the comprehensive and sustainable fulfilment of children’s participation” for children with developmental disabilities.

### I. Preface

In Japan, fulfilling sufficient support for children with disabilities has been considered as a social agenda.

With the aim of supporting children with disabilities, the Child Welfare Act (Act No. 164, 1947), providing for the basic policies for ensuring child welfare, including medical and

educational support for disabled children, living support, consultation support, child protection, and prevention of child abuse, came into force in 1947 by the Japanese government, and based on this act, child development support centers were established by municipal authorities. In 2005, the Act on Support for Persons with Developmental Disabilities (Act No. 167, 2004) was

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commenced to provide for the early detection of and provision of support for children with developmental disabilities, as well as service provided at child development support centers. In April 2016, the Act on the Promotion of the Elimination of Disability Discrimination came into force as a part of legal system improvement conducted for the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

In addition, a comprehensive website on “Everyone’s Mental Health” was established by the Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare, specifying that “developmental disabilities” are “caused due to an unusual development of the brain from birth” and are characterized to “occur from childhood”, that children with developmental disabilities often feel “difficulties living” as they grow older, and their parents also feel “difficulties parenting”, as well as the importance of “proper understanding and support” to promote their development without classifying them as handicapped. On these bases, the site promotes the understanding of developmental disabilities based on three perspectives: “What are developmental disabilities?”, “Signs and symptoms of developmental disabilities”, and “Treatment”, and introduces “governmental policies and plans”, “technical information and support guide”, and “case examples”. As “support”, information on “consultation service”, “healthcare institutions”, and “subsidy” are provided. Particularly in the column on “consultation service”, activities performed by “public health centers” and

“municipal health centers”, as well as by “family groups”, “organizations of people with disabilities”, and “self-help groups” are introduced. The Public Relations Office of the Government of Japan also featured “Special topic: What is a developmental disability?” on its website to provide information on the “understanding”, “identification”, “considerations”, and “consultation” for developmental disabilities.

With regard to school education, “Information of Education for the Persons with Developmental Disabilities” was released on the website of the National Institute of Special Needs Education. As support provided at schools, this website introduced support provided for “learning”, “behavior”, and “social skill” problems, as well as those provided according to the type of disability, such as “learning disability”. The website also contains reports on their study results, database of study materials and tools, and information on support provided in other countries. As for the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, projects to increase the expertise of academic staff and empirical research on teaching skills provided according to the characteristics of disability were conducted.

At an international level, the Committee on the Rights of the Child has carried out a number of activities to promote and protect human rights, particularly children’s rights. In order to promote the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child adopted by the United Nations in 1989, the committee

has served to monitor the implementation of the Convention by the states parties, including Japan. For the implementation of the Convention, the Committee's general comment No. 9, "the rights of children with disabilities" (hereafter "Comment No. 9"), adopted in 2007 contained specific references to disability; article 2 (on non-discrimination) and a separate article 23 (on the rights of children with disabilities) of the Convention, and requested that: All children including those with disabilities should enjoy a full and decent life, in conditions that ensure dignity, promote self-reliance, and facilitate the child's active participation in the community. Particularly concerning the participation of children with disabilities, the Comment No. 9 emphasized, that engaging children with disabilities in a decision-making process affecting them is not only essential, but also functions as a valuable tool for inclusion, in accordance with the relation to Article 12 "Respect for the views of the child" of the Convention. Furthermore, in the third periodic report of Japan adopted in 2010, the Committee expressed concerns that deep-rooted discrimination against children with disabilities still exists and that measures for children with disabilities are not carefully monitored, and it recommended to take necessary measures, including the provision of community-based services that focus on enhancing the quality of life of children with disabilities, meeting their basic needs, and ensuring their inclusion and participation.

Concerning support for children with

developmental disabilities, consultation support, learning and employment support for children, and the ideal mode of support for children and their families<sup>1)</sup> were mainly examined in other studies. As for community support, the roles of baby's health check-ups, protection of safety<sup>2)</sup>, and case examples of prefectural subsidies to municipalities supporting parents who have children with developmental disabilities<sup>3)</sup> were previously reported in other studies.

As community-based support for children with disabilities, including those with developmental disabilities, its comprehensive implementation through the creating of a "child-friendly city", recommended by UNICEF, was reported. This study examined the current status and issues regarding community-based direct support for children with developmental disabilities based on the "Child-Friendly City" model promoted by UNICEF.

## II. Purpose and Methods

This study aimed to promote support for children with developmental disabilities in Japan by examining its current status and issues emerging in the community.

In the section below, I described the current status of support provided to children with developmental disabilities in communities in Japan, and indicated issues based on the UNICEF's "Child-Friendly City" model.

### Ⅲ. Results

#### 1. Current status of support for children in Japanese communities

This study introduces the active involvement of Saitama Prefecture in the implementation of support for children with developmental disabilities conducted from the perspective of child welfare.

In accordance with the regulations for the committee on the protection of the rights of the child (2002, No. 24) enacted in 2002, the committee on the protection of the rights of the child was established as a children's rights monitoring organization in Saitama Prefecture. This committee is composed of monitoring experts, counselors, and secretariat staff. The committee aims to pursue the following activities: "provide necessary advice and support to cases related to the violation of the rights of the child", "perform monitoring, provide advice, express views, and make requests with regard to complaints seeking redress for the violation of children's rights", "publish details of advice and views expressed", and "promote and increase awareness on the protection of the rights of the child". To fulfill the above duties, the committee is authorized to conduct monitoring, coordination, and consultation activities through the use of telephone or interviews, as well as to provide advice, make requests, and express its views with regard to the protection of children's rights. Concerning monitoring and coordination, in addition to a once-a-week activity, committee meetings are

held twice a month with participation of all committee members. Telephone consultations are offered between 9:00 to 20:30, by monitoring experts mainly on violence against children, such as bullying and punishment, and school refusal. With respect to the roles of the committee, "objective resolution for and redress of children exposed to the violation of their rights", "improvement in public awareness on human rights and modification of system structures related to the violation of the rights of the child", and "protection of the rights of the child while cooperating among families, schools, communities, and welfare facilities" have been pointed out<sup>4)</sup>.

At the initiative of the Welfare Policy Division, Saitama Prefecture focused on and carried out related projects since FY 2011, as a leading prefecture committed to supporting children and adults with developmental disabilities<sup>5)</sup>. Children with developmental disabilities must be identified and supported from the early stages. In Saitama Prefecture, a step-by-step approach was taken to carry out a "project for supporting persons with developmental disabilities" as a system to identify the disabilities in the early stages. This project was gradually refined in the process of cultivating "developmental disability support managers" and "developmental disability support staff" (FY 2011), introducing "training" for elementary school teachers (FY 2013), and offering "employment support" for adults with developmental disabilities (FY 2014), resulting in a diverse support program covering from

infants to adults.

In the section below, we described major activities of the “project for supporting persons with developmental disabilities”.

#### (1) Development of human resources

Saitama Prefecture supports human resource development in “municipalities”, “nursery schools, kindergartens, regional child-raising support centers”, “elementary schools”, and “medical and educational settings providing support for children with disabilities”.

In municipal governments, the Prefecture supports the cultivation of “developmental disability support managers” who provide advice based on the knowledge of developmental disabilities and play a central role in the support of children with developmental disabilities. Municipal employees are trained for 5 days to become a “developmental disability support manager”, and so far, one hundred and some tens of them were fostered. At the request of private kindergartens and nursery schools, “developmental disability support managers” visit them and provide them with consultation and advice regarding children with developmental disabilities or other health care needs, as a member of a team of experts.

In nursery schools, kindergartens, regional child-raising support centers, the Prefecture supports the cultivation of “developmental disability support staff” who have the knowledge of and skills to identify developmental disabilities in the early stages

to support them. A 3-day training must be undertaken by kindergarten teachers or nursery staff to become a “developmental disability support staff”.

For “elementary schools”, “special needs education training” is offered to understand the support which had been provided to children during kindergarten or nursery school, and to continue supporting them in elementary school. “Special needs education training” is provided to all public and private school teachers in managerial positions, such as head teachers, and to core personnel, such as special needs education coordinators who cooperate with kindergartens or nursery schools, as well as to 1st to 3rd year homeroom teachers.

For “medical and educational settings providing support for children with disabilities”, a training program developed for physicians and nurses and that for therapists who provide medical and educational support for children with disabilities (such as occupational therapists), public health nurses, and staff of day care centers for children with disabilities are offered.

#### (2) Support for parents

In Saitama Prefecture, “visiting support”, “lectures on parenting”, and “consultation services” are provided as “support for parents”.

Visiting support: Experts in medical and educational support for children with disabilities, such as occupational therapists, visit “nursery schools”, “kindergartens”,

“regional child-raising support centers”, and “day care centers for children with disabilities” to provide facility staff and parents with advice and child-raising counseling services, respectively.

**Lectures on parenting:** Lectures on parenting are held to provide advice for stress-free parenting.

**Consultation services:** Based on the experience of raising children, consultation and advising activities are provided by parents of children with developmental disabilities (parent mentors).

### **(3) Enhancement of a system for medical service and medical/educational support for children with disabilities**

In Saitama Prefecture, the “management of core medical centers” and “establishment of a center of medical and educational support for persons with developmental disabilities” are underway as measures to “enhance a system for medical service and medical and educational support for children with disabilities”.

The “management of core medical centers” is implemented with the aim of achieving consistent delivery of medical service and medical and educational support for children with disabilities through assigning expert staff, such as physicians and occupational therapists, to homes for children with disabilities (medical care type).

With regard to the “establishment of a center of medical and educational support for persons with developmental disabilities”, the

expansion of a regional medical and educational support system is expected by assigning expert staff, such as occupational therapists, to support centers for children with developmental disabilities.

### **(4) Employment support**

To “support employment”, 3 “employment support centers for persons with development disabilities” were established in Saitama Prefecture. As an institution dedicated to supporting the employment of persons with developmental disabilities, the “employment support center for persons with development disabilities” is on the way to offer one-stop services covering from career counseling, assessment of career skills through the experience of work, training to acquire communication skills and business manners required in a workplace, to matching a person to the right job.

### **(5) Improvement and management of centers to promote support**

In Saitama Prefecture, the establishment of a “center for the general promotion of supporting persons with developmental disabilities (tentative)” is currently underway, and a “center for persons with disabilities (Mahoroba)” has been operated as a project for the “improvement and management of centers to promote support”. The “center for the general promotion of supporting persons with developmental disabilities (tentative)” is planned to be established in FY 2016 to be served as a base for general promotion of

support for children and adults with developmental disabilities. It is expected to play a central role in promoting support in combination with a project to expand medical service systems used in Saitama Children's Medical Center.

Furthermore, with the aim of creating an inclusive society, a “support plan for persons with disabilities” has been carried out to promote the general welfare of such people by cooperation among the Welfare Policy Division, Division of Welfare and Supportive Services for People with Disabilities, Support Division for Persons with Disabilities, and Social Welfare Division in Saitama Prefecture. The “support plan for persons with disabilities” consists of projects for “promoting the understanding of and eliminating discrimination against persons with disabilities”, “improving community lives of persons with disabilities and supporting their social involvement”, “providing employment support for persons with disabilities”, and “supporting persons with disabilities during disasters”. A project for “supporting children and adults with developmental disabilities” is conducted as a part of the 2nd project for “improving community lives of persons with disabilities and supporting their social involvement”.

Also, a project to “create a society where everyone with or without disabilities can live together” is currently being promoted by the Welfare Division for Persons with Disabilities in Saitama Prefecture. This project is carried out with the aims of “facilitating the

understanding of disabilities and people with them”, in response to the “Act on the Elimination of Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities” which came into force in April 2016. This project includes the following: “raising and enlighten public awareness on enforcement of the Act on the Elimination of Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities” through posters and brochures; discrimination case studies involving municipal office staff and private companies (*e.g.*, refusing entry to a wheelchair user); “holding lectures” to learn basic sign language, and “improving the system of disability identification cards” to standardize the card systems related to physical, intellectual, and psychological disabilities.

## 2. UNICEF's “Child-Friendly Cities” model

The “Child-Friendly Cities” model promoted by UNICEF is a system of governance committed to the full implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and is an approach to provide an alternative to how cities have been conceived and built by and for adults.

As the Convention addressed the child as a whole, child friendly cities are required to holistically respond to the indivisible demands of children. With regard to the grounds of the system of governance in cities committed to fulfilling the rights of children, the importance of adhering to the following four principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child were confirmed: Non-discrimination (Article 2), Best interests of the child (Article 3), The



rights to life and maximum development (Article 6), and respecting children's views (Article 12).

In a child-friendly governance system, all actors, including children, children's groups, communities, civil society organizations, NGOs, experts, practitioners, and municipal authorities, are regarded as partners committed to protecting children's rights. Particularly administrative authorities are requested to refer to the following 9 elements in reviewing information: Child-friendly laws, A city-level plan for children, A child-friendly institutional framework, Child impact assessment and evaluation, Children's budget, A situation analysis of the city's children, Making children's rights known, Independent advocacy for children, Involving children and respecting children's views.

The concept of building "Child-Friendly Cities" was developed in 1992. In the same year, the "Mayors of Defenders of Children" initiative was launched in Dakar, Senegal, as a way of involving municipal authorities in implementing child rights. In 1996, the UN Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), held in Istanbul, stressed that "the well-being of children is the ultimate indicator of a healthy society" and that "child-friendly cities are also cities that are better for all age groups". The notion of a child-friendly city was promoted as a system of governance committed to fulfilling the rights of children. In 2000, UNICEF set up the "International Secretariat for Child-Friendly Cities (CFC Secretariat)" to share information on and to

support a network of child-friendly cities.

The CFC Secretariat has influenced the debate on governance by bringing a child's perspective to influential regional and international fora. The Secretariat's mandate is to support networks of child-friendly mayors and municipalities, gather information, carry out research, and distill lessons about child-friendly cities, making these available to policy makers and other partners. The Secretariat has collected data, and also helped document and publicize successful action by cities, ensuring a platform for experience sharing.

#### IV. Discussion

To implement community-based support for children with developmental disabilities in Japan, the following agendas must be fulfilled in relation to building a child-friendly city promoted by UNICEF.

Firstly, "systems for fulfilling comprehensive and sustainable support" must be developed for children with developmental disabilities. In communities in Japan, training programs to promote the understanding of and supporting children with developmental disabilities are provided according to the area of specialty, such as municipalities, nursery schools/ kindergartens/regional child-raising support centers, elementary schools, and medical and educational settings providing support to children with developmental disabilities. To fulfill comprehensive and sustainable support, it is necessary to specify its goals, further enhance cooperation in each area of specialty,

improve related legal systems, and ensure the budgets as community-wide strategies.

Secondly, the “child’s rights to participation” must be fulfilled for children with developmental disabilities. With the current international promotion by the Committee on the Rights of the Child or UNICEF to fulfill the child’s rights to participation based on the Convention of the Rights of the Child, Japan, as one of the states parties of the Convention, is also requested to recognize children including those with developmental disabilities as partners in creating a child-friendly city. To build a city which is friendly to children with developmental disabilities, it is particularly important to reflect their views through their participation.

Thirdly, legal systems must be improved to fulfill comprehensive and sustainable participation of children in the community. Communities in Japan have a tendency to individually establish regulations related to the protection of children’s rights. In creating a city which is friendly to children with developmental disabilities, it is important to secure a legal system with a proper budgeting in which children, including those with developmental disabilities, can participate in and contribute to creating a city without limiting the range of activities such as consultation with children. This system is expected to function as an institutional framework in which policy and practice in the community are rooted as a system, and the process of assessment, monitoring, and evaluation, including data collection must be

applied to this system. The system is also expected to be known to children and residents of the community, and contributes to sharing information with other communities and children’s support organizations.

## V. Conclusions

This study examined issues in building a city which is friendly to children with developmental disabilities in Japan based on a “Child-Friendly Cities” model launched by UNICEF, after discussing practice of support for children with developmental disabilities in Japanese communities.

As shown in the practice examples in Saitama Prefecture, in the communities in Japan, the following projects are expected to be implemented: development of human resources, parenting support, enhancement of a system to provide medical and educational support for children with disabilities, employment support, and improvement and management of a support promotion center.

UNICEF, on the other hand, encourages to ensure “legal systems”, “children’s plan”, “institutional framework”, “evaluation”, “budget”, “analysis”, “making children’s rights known”, “advocacy”, and “children’s participation” in the community to create cities that are friendly to all children including those with disabilities.

In order to build a city which is friendly to children with developmental disabilities, it is required to take measures to tackle agendas, “developing systems for fulfilling comprehensive and sustainable support”,

“fulfilling children’s rights to participation”, and “improving legal systems for the comprehensive and sustainable fulfilment of children’s participation” for children with developmental disabilities.

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