

# ***Fukushima Youth Cultural Exchange Program***

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National Association of  
Japan-America Societies

TOMODACHI–NAJAS Grassroots Exchange Program



JAPAN AMERICA SOCIETY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

In partnership with



Living Dreams  
Japan



Los Angeles-Nagoya  
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## The Challenge

There are 585 children's homes (orphanages) in Japan. Nineteen of these homes are located in Tohoku, the region most severely affected by the March 11, 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami.

The Japan America Society of Southern California (JASSC) has developed a personal relationship with the largest of these Tohoku children's homes: **Fukushima Aiikuen (FA)**.

Established over 120 years ago, FA is located outside the evacuation zone of the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant. Beginning in September 2011, JASSC has made several tranches from its 2011 Japan Relief Fund to support FA, which is home to 90 children, ages 2 to 18, all affected daily by the nuclear radiation crisis.

Despite two "decontamination" cleansings of FA's buildings and surrounding areas, radiation is still detected at high levels on the ground. Thus, two and one-half years after Japan's worst natural disaster, FA's youngest children are allowed to go outside for only 10 minutes per day. Older children are allowed outside only 1.5 hours per day, basically the time it takes to ride or bike to and from school.

### **Why doesn't the Japanese government move FA children to a safer place?**

This is an excellent and often asked question. FA is located outside the crippled nuclear power plant's mandatory evacuation zone. Families with means have moved away. Hundreds of thousands of people without means remain. FA cannot afford to move. And the government will not relocate FA unless the mandatory evacuation zone is expanded.

## Helping the Children of Fukushima Aiikuen

Donations from the 2011 Japan Relief Fund are used by FA to purchase items that allow the children to remain active indoors: musical instruments, tea ceremony sets, tumbling mats, building blocks, telescopes, etc. Portable generators were also acquired so FA can prepare meals for the children in the event of rolling electricity blackouts.

Additional funds are used to provide many educational field trips for the children. These trips serve as mental and physical "breaks" for the children to escape Fukushima, even if just for a few days.

Recently, JASSC's board approved an additional tranche of funds to replace an aging vehicle used to transport the kindergarten children to school and to take children to doctor appointments.

All funds benefiting FA children are wired directly from the 2011 Japan Relief Fund's bank account to *Smiles & Dreams: Tohoku Kids Support Project*, which is managed by Living Dreams, a recognized Japanese NPO that supports orphanages in Japan. Funds are forwarded by Living Dreams to FA.

JASSC takes no administrative fee. 100% of all funds donated to the 2011 Japan Relief Fund are sent to recognized NPOs in Japan. These NPOs have proven track records of immediate humanitarian disaster relief and long-term recovery of devastated areas.



In October 2011, JAS president Doug Erber delivered a “Ganbare Fukushima Aikuen” banner signed by members of the JAS Board. Pictured here are the children’s home executive director, Hisao Saito (far left) and the home’s preschool-aged children and their teacher. Please note, in keeping with the need for confidentiality, the children’s faces have been disguised.

### **Fukushima Aikuen’s Limited Resources**

FA provides a safe, caring and clean environment for its children. However, like all children’s homes in Japan, FA falls short in addressing finer issues.

Most of the children still lack the guidance, skills and tools needed to encourage them to pursue a better future. They are trapped in a life that will be mediocre, at best. With the nuclear power plant crisis, the FA children have the added burden of worrying about serious health issues that could arise from daily radiation exposure.

An additional challenge is FA’s extremely limited budget. Like all orphanages in Japan, the first priority is to feed and clothe the children. The next priority is to maintain the homes’ facilities. There are no funds available for extra supplies, such as the items FA purchased with funds from JASSC 2011 Japan Relief Fund. Nor are there funds for extracurricular activities.

## Fukushima Youth Cultural Exchange Program

To help FA children overcome some of these challenges, JASSC applied for and won a grant for its “Fukushima Youth Cultural Exchange Program”. The grant is provided by the TOMODACHI–NAJAS Grassroots Exchange Program, managed by the TOMODACHI Initiative, a public-private program to help support the recovery of the Tohoku region.

Thanks to this grant, **eight children from FA, aged 14 to 18, accompanied by an FA staff member, will visit Los Angeles from July 20–30, 2013.** Another, similar FA delegation will visit Los Angeles in July 2014. Extra funds from the grant will cover the expenses for the FA children’s passport fees, travel insurance and other items required of any Japanese making a first-time visit to the U.S.

Beginning July 2015, JASSC and partners will strive to have the Fukushima Youth Cultural Exchange Program continue indefinitely, with in-kind and monetary donations from Southern California and Japan.

## Exchange Program Goals and Objectives

The Fukushima Youth Cultural Exchange Program will provide a life-changing experience for FA children, who otherwise have no financial means to participate and benefit from international cultural exchange activities.

It will positively affect the lives of FA children by planting the seeds of international understanding. And it is made possible without tapping into FA’s extremely limited budget. The children will enjoy the experience of living in the U.S. with an American family. We will pair two FA children per Host Family as a “buddy system” to facilitate communication and provide a level of comfort in surroundings that are completely new and unfamiliar.

Additionally, we will work to ensure the FA children have extensive contact with Americans through social and sightseeing activities, along with exposure to American culture and values. They will interact and share experiences with American children. Through these activities, we hope to provide the children a mental and physical break from their lives in Japan. The children will return home refreshed and filled with lessons that will inspire them to become successful and contributing members of their communities.

During the first two years of the youth exchange program, JASSC will work to secure sponsors to support and sustain the Fukushima Youth Cultural Exchange Program indefinitely.

## Exchange Program Management Plan

JASSC and the Fukushima Youth Cultural Exchange Program Committee will be responsible for overall management of the Fukushima Youth Culture Exchange Program.

JASSC will also be responsible for ensuring that the key elements of the exchange program are conducted in a well-coordinated, timely and fiscally responsible manner. And JASSC will work to secure monetary and in-kind donations to continue the exchange program into the future.

**About Fukushima Aikuen**

Fukushima Aikuen children's home was founded in 1893 by Iwako Uryuu (aka Iwa Uryuu), who is known for her selfless work on behalf of the orphaned, the poor and the injured. In recognition of her work, in 1896, Uryuu became the first woman to receive the Medal with Blue Ribbon (藍綬褒章) from the Japanese government. There are several statues of Uryu in Japan, including one in Senso-ji Temple in Asakusa, Tokyo.

Fukushima Aikuen consists of 11,000 square feet of buildings on nearly two acres of land. As a model children's home, Fukushima Aikuen was visited by the Emperor of Japan in 1952.

**About Japan America Society of Southern California**

JASSC was founded in 1909 to build economic, cultural, governmental and personal relationships between the people of Japan and America. It has grown to become the West Coast's premier educational and public affairs forum dedicated to the U.S.–Japan relationship.

JASSC is a qualified 501(c)(3) nonprofit, charitable and educational organization.  
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