

# Fukushima Poka Poka Project 2016 Report



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**Organizations in Charge:** Save Watari Kids / Fukurou no Kai (“Thinking About the Outdated Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant” Organization) / International Environmental NGO FoE Japan

**In Collaboration With:** Foundation for Cooperative Community Creation / HEART for FUKUSHIMA KIDS (CHIBA BOSO)



# This Year's Poka Poka

In 2016, marking the sixth year since the Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant Accident, Fukushima-related news reports have seen a decline and many of us have resumed our everyday lives as if nothing had happened.

However, despite the fact that the “Fukushima Poka Poka Project” have not been actively recruiting new participants, inquiries into the retreats continue to increase. With a 60% repeat rate, this year, Poka Poka welcomed new participants from a greater area of Fukushima including not only the middle region but the eastern region thanks to the many introductions by participating friends.

The fact that the number of retreat-seekers are only increasing as time passes is a testament to the importance and necessity that in the absence of national aid as originally promised by the “Nuclear Disaster Victims’ Support Act”, we must work to increase the number of organizations and years that provide these retreats at the local and civilian level (see National Survey on Retreats<sup>†</sup>). We can also speculate that because of the national and prefectural government’s return policy, many families who were forced to return from their evacuation sites are desperately seeking retreats and driving the applications and inquiries into Poka Poka to increase.

It will remain crucial in fiscal year 2017 that all retreat providing organizations and retreat participants work together to appeal to the national and prefectural government the need for such retreats.

In addition, centered around the high school and university students that participated in the German exchange program in 2016, many Fukushima residents are taking a more proactive role in the operation side of these retreats. This had led to the formation of new initiatives as well as an increase in many mother and fathers who join the retreats as volunteer staff rather than participants. As a result, we feel that the Poka Poka retreats are experiencing a turning point in terms of becoming a retreat that truly addresses the Fukushima residents’ needs.

## Fiscal Year 2016 Retreat Dates

### 2016

4/29-5/1	Inawashiro (16 participants)
5/3-5	Inawashiro (25 participants)
6/18, 19	Inawashiro (15 participants)
7/16-18	Inawashiro (21 participants)
8/11-17	Minami-boso (25 participants)
9/17-19	Inawashiro (24 participants)
10/29, 30	Inawashiro (17 participants)
11/19, 20	Inawashiro (26 participants)

### 2017

1/5-9	Inawashiro (28 participants)
3/18-20	Inawashiro (24 participants)
3/25-29	Minami-boso (18 participants)

Inawashiro: 9 retreats / Minami-boso: 2 retreats

Total retreats: 11

Total Participants: 239

## Germany Exchange Program Activities

2/12	Orientation
3/24-26	Inawashiro Study Retreat
4/21-5/2	Exchange in Rendsburg, Germany
5/21	Report Meeting (Tokyo)
9/24	Report Meeting (Fukushima)



<sup>†</sup> The National Survey on Retreats sent out surveys to 234 organizations in July 2016 and received answers from 107 organizations (45.7% response rate). The survey results indicate that 9,000 people participate in these retreats in a year.

# What We Value at Poka Poka

## 1 Family

Because “Poka Poka House” used to be a pension or a guest house, it is divided into 10 rooms making it welcoming for all kinds of families to stay. Families with many siblings, large age gaps, and babies can join the retreat without any hesitation.

## 2 Keeping Scolding to a Minimum

An important rule of Poka Poka is to never say “Be quiet!” Often moms and dads scold their children too much in their daily lives and they tend to scold their children even more when with other families. When the adults stop scolding, the children become more free to express themselves leading the adults to feel more calm. Eventually, everyone will be smiling.

## 3 Food

At Poka Poka, with the cooperation of co-op organizations, we use safe and nutritious ingredients with plenty of vegetables and fewer additives in order to support the immune system.

## 4 Everyone Cooks, Everyone Cleans

While cooking together, parents naturally share many of their concerns and worries regarding their children’s health as well as everyday life. Often the children will want to help and will even make dessert on their own if we provide the ingredients in advance. When we eat together, mealtimes become fun and many children will willingly eat vegetables they normally refuse. If given notice in advance, we also accommodate food allergies. As a self-catered retreat, of course everyone participates in the cooking and cleaning.

## 5 Respect

There are many ways of thinking about radiation as well as how to raise children. Some people want to evacuate but cannot for familial reasons while some returned to Fukushima after evacuating, some people feel retreats are necessary while others do not. At Poka Poka, we welcome all ways of thinking and strive to create an environment in which everyone feels comfortable to share their own ways of thinking. The same applies to raising children. Each child is different. We strive to create an environment in which all children, regardless if they have a disability, can freely and happily spend time together.

## 6 Knowledge

Information presented in the media, hidden information, health information, information on ways to live with radiation in Fukushima... in a society where we are lost in who or what to believe, at Poka Poka, we invite a variety of experts to provide seminars and consultations. We also hold seminars on intestinal bacteria and how to boost our immune system. As a way of studying the positive health effects of fermented foods, we even tried homemade miso making.

## 7 From Participant to Staff

Over 10 youths who were once participants as children have now become volunteer staff since becoming high school students. Many parents have also become volunteer staff after repeatedly coming to Poka Poka as participants. In order for these necessary retreats to continue operating long-term, it is very encouraging and important that those within the Fukushima community are also taking part in the operations.







# Response from Participants

Losing track of time as they play in the yard, sledding, skiing, etc. I feel that the children are able to experience many things in nature they are unable to experience within Fukushima city. I would love to participate in these retreats against next year.

Talking to the Bird Expert was very interesting. Watching how excited my child was in anticipation for the birds that will come and use the bird nest we set up, I hope that my child will grow up to be an adult who has an interest in Fukushima's nature and takes initiative on such matters. I thought the Bird Expert was great with both children and even adults. I was very impressed.

Especially in the winter, my children and I tend to be tucked away in the house not allowing the children much time to play outside. At the ski resort, the kids can sled all they want! The kids also got to experience new things like ice skating which is something they would have never been able to experience or feel had they stayed at home. The friends we made and the people we encountered there remain very special to us.



This was our second time coming to Poka Poka. I participated with four children including a third grader, a first grader, and 3-year-old twins. The children started playing in the snow as soon as we arrived at the Poka Poka House. They looked like they were having so much fun sledding and jumping into the snow. In the afternoon, we were taken to the Inawashiro Ski Resort where my ele-

mentary school girls got to try skiing for the first time. Although they struggled, this was a valuable experience for them and it will hopefully lead them to more opportunities in the future. My 3-year-old sons also had a great time glued to 6 grade girls who took them sledding. While they were too scared to try last year, this year, even when there was some speed, my sons were laughing and having so much fun. It made me very happy to see this. Although it is typically quite difficult to take four children to a ski resort, with the help of the volunteer staff and other kind participants, both my children and I were able to have a great time. I was touched seeing my children who complain quite easily play without any rest. I was very nervous and anxious to come to a retreat with four children. Especially since my 3-year-old twins still require a lot of attention, I was worried that they will cause a lot of inconvenience towards those around us. However, at Poka Poka, both the adults and children are always offering a helping hand and I was able to participate with much ease. Thank you so much. I would love to participate again!

While lost in the daily haste, I am recollecting how refreshed I felt at Poka Poka while looking at some photos. I usually get angry and irritated easily and can be found throwing pointed words at my family. However, while at Poka Poka, that side of me hardly came out. This is because there was no need to feel irritated there. There were only a few moments where I felt like I had to hide it. When I remember the days we spent



at Poka Poka, the calm feelings of that time resurface. Surely this is because the volunteers made us such delicious food and so kindly watched over the children. Also because I was blessed with my family and it was a joyful retreat so full of laughter. Thank you to the staff and volunteers who created this wonderfully warm atmosphere, you're all amazing! Thanks to you all, we had a wonderful five days. It was my first time participating, but I am very happy I got to meet all of you wonderful people. I was laughing everyday. Thank you very much.



I am so happy to have met everyone at Poka Poka. I was so filled with laughter; I could cry tears of joy! To the volunteers and staff that helped my family during those five days, thank you very much for your precious time.

From the very year of the Tohoku Earthquake, Poka Poka was there for me. Now, wanting to return the favor even a little, I help out as a staff. Accepting any families on the premise of having been affected by the nuclear power plants, I feel at ease sharing my anxiety about living in Fukushima or about my children as they grow up. I freed mentally, as both children and parents are able to play freely in nature. Although many retreats and aids are being cut off now that it has been six years since the disaster, I feel strength in knowing that there are still those who think of Fukushima.



# German Exchange Program

After we received word from Germany's Heinrich Böll Foundation that they wanted to invite the youths of Fukushima and Belarus to Germany as part of the European Action Week's "The Future post Fukushima and Chernobyl", we called upon the many participants of the Poka Poka Project to find five students to go to Germany. The five students prepared for the exchange through orientation and a study retreat in the months leading up to the exchange. Finally, between April 21st and May 2nd, the students visited Rendsburg in the state of Schleswig-Holstein, Germany to learn about Chernobyl and Fukushima with German high school students as well as participate in field trips to renewable energy power plants.



I went to Germany and learned many things. During my experience there, I especially felt that Japan does not teach the dangers of radiation and the amount of damage the nuclear accident caused. People in Germany learn about radiation and its dangers in class at school. I feel that Japan needs to teach the dangers of radiation and the current condition of those who work with radiation comprehensively and accurately.

How interested are Japanese people in its social problems? I was unable to express myself well when my German host family and school friends asked me about my own thoughts and opinions. Politics, economy, my future, nuclear power... they asked me about a variety of topics but I did not have any personal thoughts on what I want to do or in what way.

It made me realize that until then, I did not have much interest in Japanese social problems and as a result, had given it very little thought. This experience was very embarrassing and frustrating for me.

There are very few opportunities to talk about social issues with friends and family when living in Japan. I hope that more people who live in Japan also develop an interest in social issues and instead of thinking "someone will do something about it", they will start thinking "I will do something about it".

# Origins of the Project and Our Efforts Until Now

From immediately after the nuclear power plant accident in Fukushima, FoE Japan rejected the 20mSv evacuation standard that was adopted and have worked to create a "Selective Evacuation Area" in which those in the area of public exposure of 1mSv a year are given aid regardless of whether they chose to stay or evacuate. However, the Japanese government has refused to change their stance that "evacuation is unnecessary in areas with exposure of 20mSv or less a year" and as a result, many of those want to evacuate but cannot for various reasons were left behind. As a response to these circumstances, FoE Japan, in cooperation with other organizations, launched a weekend retreat program called "Fukushima Poka Poka Project" in January, 2012.

From April 2013, we moved the retreat from Tsuchiyu Onsen to Inawashiro and expanded the target to residents of all of Fukushima prefecture. Now, we offer 10 to 12 sessions a year including weekend retreats in Inawashiro and longer retreats in the spring and summer in Minamiboso, Chiba. The total number of participants from 2013 has reached 780 people. Starting in January 2015, FoE Japan has taken over the lease of the former pension in Inawashiro renaming it the "Poka Poka House" and also renting it out to be used as a place for other organizations to host their retreat programs.

Today, children who participated in the Poka Poka Project as children have returned as high school student volunteers. In April 2016, high school students participated in an exchange with German and Belarusian students in Germany making Poka Poka a place for children to acquire the "power to live" and broaden their horizons.

Poka Poka Project Blog: <http://ameblo.jp/pokapro/>

# Schedule (April 2017 to March 2018)

29-30 April 2017 (Inawashiro)      16-18 September 2017 (Inawashiro)  
 3-7 May 2017 (Inawashiro)      18-19 November 2017 (Inawashiro)  
 10-11 June 2017 (Inawashiro)      5-8 January 2018 (Inawashiro)  
 15-17 July 2017 (Inawashiro)      24-26 March 2018 (Inawashiro)  
 11-17 August 2017 (Minami-boso)



We greatly welcome overseas organizations with a desire to host refreshment programs abroad. Although many citizen groups in Japan offer camps for children in Fukushima, many children are unable to take part due to the lack of opportunities. If you or your organization is interested in offering such camps, retreats, or exchange programs for children in Fukushima, please contact us.

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