

# Volunteer voices from the Okayama University students helping the recovery from the heavy rain disaster of July 2018

## -Let's do what we need to do-



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After areas across Okayama suffered from the heavy rain disaster of July 2018, Okayama University set up the Disaster Countermeasure Headquarters on July 7. In addition to holding volunteer briefing sessions and establishing the Okayama University Volunteer Center (OVC), Okayama University also partnered with The Nippon Foundation Student Volunteer Center (Gakuvo).

For this bulletin, we have gathered several student volunteers and Senior Assistant Professor Ken Aoo, who also serves as the Deputy Director of OVC, to talk about their experiences and thoughts. (Reporter: Shinji Takahashi, Director of Public Relations and Information Strategy)

### — What made you join volunteering? What did you do?

**Nakao:** The disaster area I saw on TV was shocking and I wanted to contribute something because it was happening near me. At first, I was volunteering at the Disaster Volunteer Center in Kitaku, Okayama City. I also participated in activities in Kurashiki City.

**Kubo:** I thought that I could do something and called the Disaster Volunteer Center in Kitaku. Although I was going to give up because I was first told that I could only help if

I had my own transportation. I was finally able to join because the OVC was established and it prepared a bus for us. I worked on needs survey and mud removal in Higashiku, Okayama city.

**TAN:** I was shocked to see people suffering in Okayama, which was famous for being disaster-free. I was a member of a committee for World Vision, an NGO in Malaysia, my home country, and joined the disaster relief efforts in Okayama to fulfill my feeling of civic responsibility. I helped the recovery in Soja city and Kurashiki city.

### —What did you feel by volunteering?

**Nakao:** At first, when the victims shedding tears said "Thank you", I had no idea what to say. When I saw other volunteers talk to the victims, I realized it was important to care for their hearts as well as do cleanup.



**Kubo:** I participated in an interview survey. When we asked for their needs, the victims responded "We don't need help"; however, when we visited them later, they were glad for our help. I learned that people in disaster areas have complex feelings, and we need to directly communicate with them to know their real needs.

**TAN:** During the devastating situation, I was impressed that the people in disaster-hit areas tried to overcome their hardship with smiles without giving up. Although I am an international student, I had no hesitation in volunteering. The difference between words in Japanese and international students is a wall but I believe that when there is a good cause, we can be together by acting beyond the language barrier and race differences.

### — What did you get by volunteering? Also please tell us about your future involvement with volunteering, and any request to OVC.

**Nakao:** I had a lot of time because I had decided my employment after graduation so I was able to volunteer. It was really worthwhile. I was able to learn many new things. It takes time to recover from disasters so it is important not to forget the victims. I would like to continue to support them.



**Kubo:** A woman who was assisted by volunteers was feeling sad that her garden cherished for many years was covered in mud. I was glad that I could help her forget the disaster temporarily

by asking her thoughts on the garden while I was removing mud. In the future, I would like to share this experience further.

**TAN:** My view of life has changed. Victims were positive and smiled. When I saw this, I started to think that it is important to live believing tomorrow will be better. I have been in Japan for a year and a half and I think that Japanese society is orderly and organized. It did not change even in the disaster area. I felt the strength of the Japanese people. It is also important for safe volunteer activities that OVC will continue to provide volunteer information. I think that it is even better if there is information provided in English.



### — Do you have any advice for future volunteers?

**Nakao:** Volunteering, I understood the importance of taking the first step. Although I think participants may be hesitant, it also leads to future disaster prevention. It makes sense to participate, I want more people to have the experience.

**Kubo:** OVC gave a good orientation so I could understand what I could do. I think there are many people thinking that women cannot contribute but I want everyone to know there is always something anyone can do. First of all, it is

important to go. Work that needs volunteers will not go away so please participate.

**TAN:** Since OVC gave us health safeguards such as against heat stroke, we could participate with peace of mind. Volunteering was not as hard as I thought. The things each person can do is small but by putting it all together a big effect is born.

### — Finally, Mr. Aoo, deputy center director of OVC, please give your reflection after hearing everyone's stories.

**Aoo:** As a deputy director of OVC since after the disaster, I am really very grateful for all the volunteers. Even the operation of the center was greatly relying on student volunteers. In the event of a disaster, you have to think on our own what should be done and do it little by little. I think that the first step is important. By doing what you can do, you can take the next step, which will then make new changes and so on each step taken. Twenty years ago, I was working as a student volunteer, but now I am supporting volunteers. Obviously, I have learned a lot and developed a lot as a person from volunteering.



### Initiatives of OVC



**July 11** A briefing session for disaster volunteers was held at Tsushima Campus of Okayama University, and 237 students participated. Rules and on-campus procedures for working as volunteers as well as other related topics were discussed.



**July 17** Okayama University set up the "Okayama University Volunteer Center" in the General Education Building C 1F.



**July 21, 28, August 4** Volunteer activity with students and staff by OVC took place in Higashiku, Okayama city, and Kurashiki city.



**August 20** OVC invited four high school and mid-school students from Kurashiki city and gave orientation and exchange in the Agricultural Department, Student Cafeteria, University Library, and SDGs Science Café.