

## Our Aid to Japan: Helping Survivors Rebuild Their Lives

One year after the earthquake, tsunami and radiation disaster in northeastern Japan, AmeriCares is working to restore health to this shattered region. Japan faces decades of clean-up and rebuilding. While the Japanese government clears debris, rebuilds roads and provides temporary housing for more than 300,000 left homeless, AmeriCares is focusing on the needs of survivors.

With our Japanese partners, AmeriCares is building temporary clinics, delivering meals and supplies, transporting volunteers and bringing comfort and counseling to those who are displaced and distressed.

“So many people in Japan lost everything,” says AmeriCares President and CEO Curt Welling. “Thanks to the generosity of our donors, AmeriCares is helping survivors regain their health and rebuild their lives.”

Since March 2011, AmeriCares has provided \$3.2 million in aid to Japan, including medical and hygiene supplies, vehicles for mobile medical teams, dental clinics, space heaters for evacuees in temporary apartments and medical and social services for devastated communities up and down the coast.



Photo by Paula Bronstein/Getty Images

The Japanese are starting on a decades-long road to recovery.

### Looking Ahead

In the next two years, AmeriCares aid to Japan will help:

- Restore access to health services
- Provide counseling to help survivors cope with trauma and loss
- Assist evacuees
- Support people with disabilities

Mountains of debris remain where a town once stood.



Photo by Ramona Bajema/AmeriCares

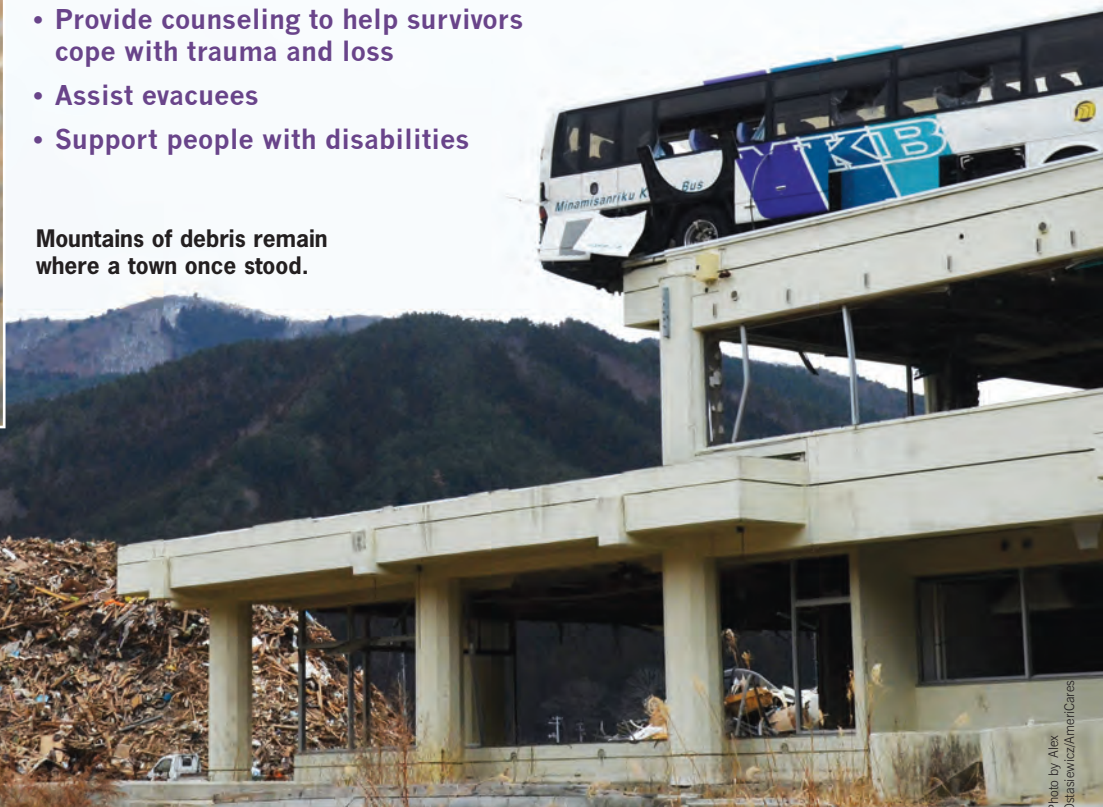


Photo by Alex Ostasiewicz/AmeriCares





Photo by Alex Ostasiewicz/AmeriCares

**A town unites for healing.**

## Learning to Live With Loss

Tomoka slips her hands into a soft pile of mashed soybeans. Here in Okawa, making miso—fermented soybean paste—is more than a cooking project: It provides a healing connection.

Tomoka and her neighbors in Okawa experienced unbelievable trauma when 74 local elementary school children and 14 of their teachers perished in the tsunami. Everyone in Japan knows the story of the elementary school children who died—Tomoka, a middle-school student, lost her younger sister. But the surviving children, teachers and families have their story too. Now, after months of guilt, doubt and isolation, they are discovering ways to talk about their loss and care for others and themselves.

In an AmeriCares-funded program called Riogrande, 20 children meet each week to study, talk and be screened for signs of distress. A core group of students gather monthly to plan events and learn coping and leadership skills. Riogrande provides a way for the entire community to support the children and families—residents and businesses have donated books, snacks, a television and even the soybeans used to make the miso.

“The children are becoming friendlier—they are more willing to open up and hug,” says program administrator Mr. Nakayama. “They tend to have different personalities at home, school and here at Riogrande. They say they find it easiest to relax here.” Parents use the time to meet with counselors, grieve and recover. The AmeriCares staff is hoping to support similar programs in other communities dealing with the trauma of loss.

## A Healthy New Start

On October 11, 2011, seven months after the earthquake and tsunami, a young boy in Minamisanriku leaned back in a big pink chair and opened his mouth: He was about to get his teeth checked by Dr. Abe, one of the town’s dentists. After months of living in a temporary shelter and eating foods such as crackers and sweets (convenient but sticky fare that promotes tooth decay), this visit was a step toward better health for one child. But it also represented a healthier future for the area’s 10,000 residents.

The March 2011 earthquake and tsunami devastated this town: Close to half of Minamisanriku’s 19,000 residents perished. The quake and wave also wiped out the town’s six dental clinics. Residents evacuated to temporary shelters, surviving on packaged food and cut off from their normal routines of brushing and flossing. Many older survivors lost their dentures in the tsunami and were unable to chew food, putting their health in jeopardy. As the months went by, the town’s dentists worried about dental disease, including infections, especially among the elderly.

Local dentists appealed to AmeriCares to immediately fund two full-service clinics at a cost of \$400,000. Because the pre-fabricated buildings went up quickly, the trained staff did not have to leave Minamisanriku to find work. And their jobs will continue: The clinics will remain in place until the government builds permanent clinics, which some estimate could take ten years.

Within days of opening, the clinics were filled with a steady stream of patients—on average, 350 week. The dentists are busy filling cavities (in children, especially) and making replacement dentures, for new patients and some they have known for decades.

**Back to the dentist, finally.**



Photo by Ramona Baljema/AmeriCares



# Growing a Future Where Homes Once Stood

Like most of the other residents in the small coastal town of Ogatsu, Mr. Takahashi lost everything in the earthquake and tsunami, including his house. He knows he cannot rebuild so close to the water. But, with help from AmeriCares, Mr. Takahashi can grow a garden where his house once stood.



Adding new soil and life to a place full of memories.

Photo by Alex Ostasiewicz  
AmeriCares

AmeriCares and local partner Peace Boat bring volunteers each day to help Mr. Takahashi and 350 other residents in and around Ogatsu create gardens. A nurse arrives, too, to monitor the health of the gardeners—taking their blood pressure and watching for signs of stress and depression.

Many residents left the area after March 11, 2011. Elderly people moved closer to hospitals and their adult children. Younger people went to find jobs—the fishing industry here is still crippled. (Mr. Takahashi, who traveled the world in a fishing vessel, will switch to farming seaweed.) Those who

remain are somewhat stranded, not knowing if their community will be rebuilt, where or when.

Facing an uncertain future, residents asked AmeriCares for something they could plan, build and grow: gardens. Here, where his living room once held his collection of ocean navigation maps, Mr. Takahashi will plant tomatoes, cucumbers and pumpkins.

Mr. Takahashi and the other residents cannot have their homes back. But with soil, seeds and help from AmeriCares, they can cultivate hope for the future.

## Protection For Survivors

An estimated 80,000 people were evacuated from the 12 miles around the damaged Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant after the earthquake and tsunami. Residents left quickly, not knowing if they would ever return. Just outside the mandatory evacuation zone, thousands more residents had to make a decision that would change their lives forever: Stay, and risk possible health effects from the radiation, or leave and abandon their homes, belongings, communities and jobs. AmeriCares is helping both groups.

**For those who chose to stay:** After surviving the earthquake and escaping from the tsunami waters, residents in Yamamoto-cho are left with damaged homes, mud and radioactive contamination. Every week, the residents gather

at a sports complex to receive personal care items, including protective face masks that filter dust particles. For many, this weekly meeting is the only time they see their neighbors. With the Japan Institute of Cultural Affairs, AmeriCares has distributed supplies—including more than 22,000 masks—to residents and workers cleaning this area.

**For mothers and children who left:** Single mothers who fled the radioactive contamination face a myriad of challenges—as a group they are poor, unemployed or underemployed and often face ostracism in Tokyo, a huge city they do not know. To help them, AmeriCares is funding telephone counseling and weekly social gatherings, ensuring that the women have the mental health and legal counseling they need.



Gathering weekly for aid.

Photo by Ramona Bajema/AmeriCares



# Emergency Warmth, Delivered

After living in a high school gym for three months after the earthquake, Mr. Shiga was happy to find a temporary apartment in Sendai City. Then winter came. Like all apartments in Japan, Mr. Shiga's did not come with central heating. He turned on his computer and television to generate a little warmth when the outside temperature dropped below freezing. Like thousands of other evacuees, he shivered under donated blankets.



Mr. Shiga

Now, Mr. Shiga is finally warm. He is among the 1,300 families who received electric space heaters from AmeriCares in January. While the Japanese government purchased heaters for evacuees living in temporary houses, it lacked

funds to supply apartments like Mr. Shiga's. AmeriCares and our partner, Association for Aid and Relief, responded to an emergency request from the government. AmeriCares purchased and, with AAR, distributed the heaters throughout the hard-hit Miyagi Prefecture.

In their temporary apartment in Tomiya, Mr. and Mrs. Kawamura bask in the warmth of their new heater, also from AmeriCares. The Kawamura's home in Ogatsu was swamped by tsunami waters. "Only our lives were saved," Mrs. Kawamura says. "Nothing else." The couple, both in their 70s, especially miss their hobbies—their lifelong home had vegetable and bonsai gardens. The Kawamuras struggle with boredom and loneliness but now, at least, they are warm. And like Mr. Shiga, they look forward to spring, which they hope will bring more warmth and connections with friends, old and new.

Mr. and Mrs. Shoji are grateful for their heater.



Photo by Ramona Bajema/AmeriCares

## Meals That Heal

Isolation kills: In Japan, there is even a word for death by loneliness and neglect—*kodokushi*.

Japanese health care experts know that the 300,000 people left homeless by the tsunami, earthquake and radiation are at risk—already, some *kodokushi* deaths have been reported. After the Kobe earthquake in 1995, Japanese health officials estimated 200 deaths due to *kodokushi*. Not all effects are immediate: Isolation also increases risk for heart disease, cancer and alcoholism.

AmeriCares is helping evacuees battle isolation and its accompanying health risks. In Kesennuma City and nearby towns, AmeriCares works with Nippon International Cooperation for Community Development to deliver

hot meals to the blocks of temporary houses. With NICCO, AmeriCares brings university student volunteers to serve soup and other hot food. A nurse and a trained mental health expert also join in, to identify people at risk. The hot meals bring people out of their houses. When just the health workers came, only about 10 people showed up; at an event with hot soup and barbecue, 360 residents attended.

With our partners, AmeriCares will reach more than 13,000 people with hot meals, screening for stress and community-building events in the next six months.



Photo courtesy of NICCO

Volunteers prepare fresh food for evacuees.

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AmeriCares is a nonprofit global health and disaster relief organization that delivers medicines, medical supplies and aid to people in crisis around the world and across the United States. Since 1982, AmeriCares has delivered more than \$10 billion in aid to 164 countries.

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