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TOM TOM ENGLISH



Organisations tackle problem of childhood hunger in Japan

VOCABULARY

Ends meet =
earn just enough
money to live on

Undernourished

=
having insufficient
food or other
substances for good
health and condition

Utilise =
make practical and
effective use of

Hearty =
wholesome and
substantial

Read the article overleaf and discuss these questions:

1. Did you know that there was a childhood hunger problem in Japan?
2. As a child, did you have enough food? If yes, which meal of the day did you look forward to? Why?
3. What are some examples of comfort food? What are your personal comfort foods? Why?
4. Do you think there are kids in Tokyo who are not having enough food on a daily basis? What can we/ you personally, do about it?
5. If you could start or be part of a charity organisation, which cause or type of charity would you get involved with? Why do you think that some Japanese struggle with the concept of charity or supporting a charity?

VOCABULARY

Comfort food =
food that provides
consolation or a feeling
of well-being, typically
having a high sugar or
carbohydrate content
and associated with
childhood or home
cooking

Movement =
a group of people
working together to
advance their shared
political, social, or
artistic ideas

Long run =
a relatively long period
of time

Tough economic times can and do happen everywhere in the world. Even in wealthy, developed countries like Japan, some folks struggle every day to make **ends meet**. Sometimes, those people are families with young children. Childhood hunger is a worldwide problem, and they can't really do anything to help better their situation. They need the food and nutrition to help their bodies continue to grow properly. In Japan, approximately 16% of two-parent families are financially unable to provide enough food for their children, and that number jumps to 32% for single-parent households, according to a 2012 survey. But there are some who refuse to stand by doing nothing and are dedicating themselves to feeding the hungry children in Japan.

Across the country, *kodomo shokudo*, literally "kids cafeterias," are being established by citizens hoping to help fill the empty bellies of **undernourished** children in their area. The *kodomo shokudo* initiative began in 2012, with the efforts of a fruit and vegetable shop in Tokyo's Ota Ward, and has since started spreading nationwide.

Kurume Kodomo Shokudo opened this past August in Fukuoka Prefecture, **utilising** the event space of a shopping street in Kurume City. Open on the last Sunday of every month, Kurume Kodomo Shokudo offers a **hearty** menu of curry and rice, a favourite **comfort food** of many Japanese children that can be packed full of healthful vegetables. The price per child is 300 yen for an all-you-can-eat meal, and if the child colours a picture, they also receive a 100-yen discount. When the manager of the operation, Daisuke Kawano, 38, first heard about the *kodomo shokudo* **movement** on the news he remembered his own childhood, when the gas and electricity in his home had been turned off and there was hardly enough food on the table.

"There are a great number of children who go hungry. It can't be ignored," Kawano states. An education official from Fukuoka also adds "There are many elementary and junior high kids who depend on school lunches, who come back from summer break looking very thin." Kawano runs the operation with donations and vegetables from

supporters, and any lacking funds he makes up with money from his own pocket.

In the center of Nagasaki City is another similar operation called Yume Cafe...Himawari, built from a remodeled udon noodle shop. Since November of last year, it has been open every Thursday evening from 6:30 to 9, offering free, unlimited curry and rice to its young customers. For many of these kids, it's their first and only meal of the day. 68-year-old Kenzo Kawai, who runs the establishment with his own money, also offers consultations for the children, as well as a study group.

"I want these kids to have dreams and goals, despite their mountain of troubles," Kawai remarks. "I want to create a place to connect with these kids, where they can get the support they need."

Back in Fukuoka, members taking part in dietary education activities at the Itazuke North Community Center are preparing to open their own *kodomo shokudo* starting November 28, with plans to offer 200-yen meals to children on the fourth Saturday of every month.

Since April of last year, the institute Street Project has been tackling the problem of hungry youth in Fukuoka City, offering free meals to teens and young adults from ages 15 to 25. The group uses donations, as well as money earned from selling used books, to feed the current 31 youths in the program. The chairman of the project, Keiko Tsuboi, says of Street Project: "Many of the kids who come here deal with difficult issues like abuse, but if we don't first give them some relief and get some food in their stomachs, we can't get them to talk about their problems. We don't intend to solve the problems with food; we want to support them for the **long run** from all different angles."

There need to be more selfless, dedicated people like Kawano, Kawai, and Tsuboi stepping up to face the issues of childhood hunger in Japan, as well as the rest of the world. If you're interested in helping out the organisations above, you can contact them via their homepage.