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Tuesday, Jan. 15, 2013

Okinawa center offers respite for Fukushima kids

Jiji

A center set up on Kumejima Island in Okinawa is providing active recovery support for children affected by the nuclear crisis in Fukushima Prefecture.

Kumi No Sato, some 100 km west of Naha, Okinawa's capital, was set up by the nonprofit organization Okinawa Kumi No Sato after the nuclear crisis began in March 2011 as a way to help disaster-afflicted children in Fukushima stay healthy.

The facility, which opened last July, is modeled after a recuperation center in Belarus set up in 1994 for child victims of the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear accident. Photojournalist Ryuichi Hirokawa, 69, who helped run the center, is using his experience there to manage Kumi No Sato.

The facility was built on the site of a former pottery studio in the town of Kumejima. So far, some 300 children from Fukushima have been invited for two-week stays free of charge, including airfare.

Hirokawa, chairman of the NPO, said the visiting children can put aside their radiation fears and fully enjoy Kumejima's natural beauty.

The program also provides comprehensive thyroid examinations for the children, who can also enjoy food untainted by



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radiation.

Starting this June, it plans to hold a "study camp," in which schoolchildren from Fukushima will be able to study and interact with their teachers, Hirokawa said.



Wjatscheslaw Makuschinskij

Kumi No Sato runs solely on donations, which come mainly from individuals, although 80 percent of the financing for its model facility in Belarus, the Hope 21 center, is covered by the government.

The Japanese project is run by a handful of regular staff, with help from unpaid volunteers, including residents of Kumejima.

Hope 21 director Wjatscheslaw Makuschinskij told a news conference in Tokyo in December that both support of the government and the help of citizens are essential to keep such projects running.

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