

A DANDELION IN CEBU

Ms. Takako Yamada



Left: Takako Yamada holds up 3 fingers indicating 'W' for "Waku Work"

Right: Takako Yamada seen here offering some friendly words to underprivileged young children.

ROGER D. SMITH

AT a comparatively young age, Takako Yamada has already started her own company, travelled extensively around the Philippines in her humanitarian work, become a Global Shaper with the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Switzerland and has earned the kudos of her community back in Japan. In short, Ms. Yamada is one of Japan's up-and-coming young leaders who has demonstrated perseverance and ingenuity in the face of considerable hardship.

During a trip to Cebu City in the Philippines seven years ago, Ms. Takako Yamada was still a

youth who was struck by the contrasts with her own home town in Japan in terms of wealth and opportunity. One important point of commonality, however, was the emphasis that Filipinos placed on the bonds of family, community and trust. It was this point more than any other that drew her to this southern island to start her life anew.

Ms. Yamada hails from Yugawara, Kanagawa Prefecture. She grew up in an environment that had a very supportive family, school and community that encouraged her to pursue her ambitions beyond the normal limits. Her first trip abroad as an exchange school student in Australia left

an indelible impression that stoked her passion for travel. When she finally graduated from university, she was keen on living in the Philippines to assist the needy there.

Four years ago, she founded Waku Work in an effort to create work for under-privileged youth of promising talent. She hires individuals seeking future opportunities and involvement in the community, and partners them via the internet as English language teachers with university students in Japan. Presently, Waku Work has links with Meiji Gakuin University, Kaetsu University and Kyoto-Zokei University. Individuals can also sign-up to the program as well.

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The university links also offer student exchanges. Japanese undergraduates are given the opportunity to visit the Philippines for a one-week tour to partake in life in Cebu and explore the city and countryside. During this component of the course - called “adventuring” by Waku Work - students take seminars that emphasize interpersonal communication, participate local projects and develop a personal bond with their local hosts. Ms. Yamada emphasizes, “most participants learn the fundamentals required for effective communication, namely trust, love and community.”

The students are also guided by an older generation, who are dubbed “Mamas and Papas.” The elderly and women play a central role in Philippine society and this is reflected in Waku Work’s exchange program. Mamas and Papas sit in on the seminar meetings to help offer guidance and vision when necessary.

In the future, Ms. Yamada aims to provide greater opportunities to younger



generations, especially disadvantaged children. “I hope to help create a world in which our children are given greater opportunities, irrespective of whether they come from cities or the countryside, are from Japan or the Philippines.” Being a WEF Global Shaper also taught her that such collaboration and having aspirations for the future are of great value and can lead to betterment of one’s station in life. “Much like one can find dandelions growing between the cracks of pavement even in the middle of Shibuya’s urban sprawl, the human spirit can survive against even supposedly insurmountable odds. It is this spirit that can then offer life and hope to a new generation.” **I**



Waku Work project members and students share a smile