



From Adversity to Leadership

MINAMI TSUBOUCHI OFFERS SUPPORT TO DISASTER SURVIVORS

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EDUCATION can lay the foundation for a lifetime. It can raise people from poverty and protect them from disease, increase choice and opportunity in employment, and empower people to influence the society in which they live.

Minami Tsubouchi is Executive Director of the Global Fund for Education Assistance, a nonprofit foundation she established in June 2011. The foundation aims to support the higher education and leadership development of young people in Japan's northeastern Tohoku region, which was devastated by the Great East Japan Earthquake on March 11, 2011.

Tsubouchi has never been one to take the easy path. "Even as a child," she says, "I would go shopping to the farthest grocery on the street or take the train to the station next to my own, just to see what was there. I was curious, and little by little I expanded my perspective. So in junior high I spent two years abroad."

Moving to Canada to study abroad at the age of 14, the experience was not as easy as Tsubouchi had anticipated. "Before leaving, I thought people would be waiting for me with flowers, everyone would be interested in the fact that I was Japanese and I would quickly find fame and fortune. Then reality struck. I couldn't make friends, I couldn't speak English, and I missed my family."

Even so, she never thought about going home, and she never

gave up. Tsubouchi spent four years in Canada - the first two in a Canadian boarding school and the last two in an international school with a full scholarship from Keidanren, the Japan Business Federation. Then, after receiving her bachelor's degree in policy management at Tokyo's Keio University, she received a scholarship from the College Women's Association Japan (CWAJ) and the Joint Japan/World Bank Graduate Scholarship Program (JJ/WBGSP) to study at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), where she received her master's degree in urban planning.

Now based in Tokyo, Tsubouchi also worked with the Association for Aid and Relief, Japan (AAR Japan) in Kabul, Afghanistan; the World Economic Forum in Geneva, Switzerland; and the Bahrain Economic Development Board in

Manama, Bahrain. It was while she was working in Bahrain that the Great East Japan Earthquake hit. Though a Tokyo native herself, she headed back to Japan to visit affected areas in Miyagi Prefecture. The devastation she saw fixed her determination to support the youth of the region.

Founded within three months of the earthquake, the Global Fund for Education Assistance administers the BEYOND Tomorrow program, which offers scholarships to Tohoku students seeking higher education in Japan or abroad, as well as running leadership programs that aim to help Tohoku youth chase their dreams and become the leaders of tomorrow. In September 2011, the program sent seven high school and university students from the Tohoku region to the World Economic Forum's Annual Meeting of the New Champions in Dalian, China. In October of

the same year, BEYOND Tomorrow invited 70 high school students from Miyagi, Iwate and Fukushima Prefectures to the first Tohoku Future Leaders Summit, where they shared ideas on how best to rebuild their hometowns. The TOMODACHI BEYOND Tomorrow Global Leadership Academy, on the other hand, is run in cooperation with the U.S. embassy in Tokyo, and allows Japanese students a chance to visit the U.S. to deepen their understanding of global issues.

Tsubouchi believes great leaders can be born through great adversity, and that great leaders are critical for the revitalization of the Tohoku region. With her varied international experience, she herself is an excellent model for leadership and education, always pushing herself to learn and grow. Asked what she likes about her job, she replies simply, "The fact that I can learn so much." 



1 Tsubouchi at TOMODACHI BEYOND Tomorrow Global Leadership Academy 2014

2 TOMODACHI BEYOND Tomorrow Global Leadership Academy 2014

3 Tohoku Future Leaders Summit 2013

