

A PLATFORM FOR DREAMS

◆ Haruka Mera's crowdfunding company **READYFOR** is an online service that allows organizations and individuals to connect with others via the Internet to chronicle their visions and dreams, raise or provide funding, and make an impact on the world.

SHANNON JIH

As president of the online service **READYFOR**, Haruka Mera taps into the power of digital media to set the stage for small organizations and individuals to share their ideas and hopes on the Internet and find funding for their projects. Launched in 2011, **READYFOR** became Japan's first crowdfunding site. Mera was named a Global Shaper by the World Economic Forum in 2011, and in addition was the youngest Japanese participant chosen to attend the 2012 St. Gallen Symposium Leaders of Tomorrow event in Davos.

Mera first explored the concept of crowdfunding in 2009 during her fourth year at Keio University. She met Hideki Arai, the Paralympic ski coach for Japan, who was in need of funds for his team. Mera helped Arai raise money through one of her media website projects.

"While all of my friends were preparing for their post-graduation careers, I didn't have a clear idea of what I liked doing, or even what I was particularly skilled at," Mera recalls. "After I met Coach Arai, however, I thought the Internet would be a great tool for people to spread their dreams and find like-minded individuals. I discovered that I liked finding the potential within people and sharing that with others."

In 2010, Mera went to the United States as an exchange student at Stanford University. She used



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the opportunity to further explore crowdfunding as a market to help promote personal growth.

Under Mera's guidance, READYFOR has publicized over 3,600 projects and raised over 1.8 billion yen in funding. Of course, each project is subject to rigorous review before and after being undertaken, and requires careful management from beginning to end. Mera points to medical care as a major theme. The READYFOR of the Year 2015 grand prize, for example, was awarded to "Maggie's Tokyo," a project originating in the UK designed to create a center where people diagnosed with cancer could receive practical, emotional and social support from qualified experts and cancer survivors.

Another trend Mera sees is a surge in local town renewal projects. "Up until 2014, there were many projects supporting disaster recovery after the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011, but they have become only some of a number of projects," she says. "There is now a steady increase in projects designed to bring people back to the Tohoku area by branding communities and establishing community spaces such as libraries."

There has also been a rise in global collaboration projects at READYFOR, such as ones supporting countries in Africa. An example is the Mulindi Japan One Love Project, which provides artificial limbs for people in Rwanda and is currently getting a lot of attention on READYFOR.

"READYFOR allows people working abroad to focus on their projects without needing to return



to Japan for fundraising," Mera says. "They can remain on location and share updates on the platform in real time."

No matter the scope of the project, Mera and her team at READYFOR have a mission to support anyone in realizing their dreams. Mera hopes that more and more people will challenge themselves to share new ideas with the world. "Unlike Americans who have been taught to express themselves at an early age, Japanese people feel as if they are facing a tall hurdle when asked to tell others their dreams," Mera notes. "I want to continue to find new methods to help people summon the courage to take that first step toward leaving their mark on the world." **7**

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- 1 Mera and colleagues looking over proposals at the READYFOR office
 - 2 Mera speaking at the 2012 St. Gallen Symposium Leaders of Tomorrow event in Davos
 - 3 With Nobel Peace Laureate Muhammad Yunus at the St. Gallen Symposium