



Nekojarashinbun

When seeing the children play energetically outside the facility, we decided to name the paper Nekojarashinbun, taking inspiration from nekojarashi (green foxtail), which also refers to a cat feather toy and carries the connotation of playing. Upon learning the name of the paper, Midori Ito, the facility director, brought us six green foxtails arranged in a vase.

On Saturday, August 6th, we visited the PEP Kids Koriyama Center (Koriyama Cheerful Play Space). As it was the middle of the summer holidays, there were many parents with their children there.

About PEP Kids Koriyama



Aug. 7 was an extremely hot day, with the temperature reaching 36 degrees, and the children were busy playing inside the air-conditioned facility.

The facility was built to provide a play area for children who, at the time, were not able to play outside because of the nuclear accident. The Center is equipped with a sandbox and a variety of play equipment to allow the children to play with abandon indoors. The fa-

cility was established by the municipal government of Koriyama City and is run by the non-profit organization PEP Network of Child Care in Koriyama. The PEP Kids Koriyama Center is aimed at children between six months and 12 years old.

No change in the number of visitors

According to a chart showing changes in the number of visitors, the number of people visiting the facility was highest three months after its opening. Because of the possibility of radiation, there was little opportunity for children to play outside. Both parents and children were looking for someplace children could play freely. Looking at the figures from last year until now, it is clear

that the number of visitors has stabilized. Obviously, Pep Kids Koriyama is loved by many people.

Changes in the number of visitors

Listed below is the average number of visitors per day for each year. The facility was opened on December 23, 2011. The number of visitors for that year is calculated for the period between December 2011 and March 2012. Even after five years, there has been no drop in the number of people visiting the facility. The numbers show that the facility has gained popularity among parents and children, not only because of the worry about radiation but also as an overall safe place where children can play.

2011	-	1231
2012	-	944
2013	-	880
2014	-	897
2015	-	936

I can play again at last!

Outdoor play equipment

When I came here five years ago, what I liked most was the bicycle. Since I had not been able to ride a bicycle because of the radiation, I really enjoyed it. The second thing I enjoyed most was the sandbox. Even in kindergarten, playing outside was prohibited, so being able to play in the sand again was great fun. This time, I enjoyed the ball pool and the 30-meter running course the most. (Yuki Sato)

Beaming faces all around!

The first time I came here, I was a second-year elementary school student. I played to my heart's content. On my visit this time to report on the facility, what I noticed most was the way the children were playing so cheerfully. It has now become a place where children can enjoy playing without worrying about radiation exposure. I hope the facility continues to be

used by lots of children.

(Kotaro Omokawa)

The joy of playing

I used to not like playing that much. Thanks to PEP Kids Koriyama, I learned to enjoy playing outside my home. Visiting this time, I was surprised at how many people there were and how the sandbox was all muddy. I suppose the reason there is no drop in the number of people coming here is because it is nice to have a place to play where it is cool in the summer and warm in the winter.

(Takamune Yoshida)

The sound of children as background music

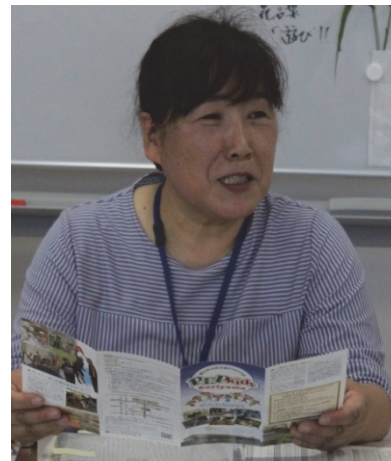
Midori Ito, the facility director

The facility director, Midori Ito, is from Koriyama City. She has been working in the childcare profession for 40 years. She says she felt pity for children not be-

ing able to play outside after the earthquake disaster.

“For children, playing is life itself. I felt that, as an adult, I had to do something. I was overjoyed when I saw the sandbox set up. For the future of Fukushima, special care has to be given to health, food and the environment.”

In the PEP kitchen area, we saw a lot of parents and children busy preparing dishes. “There is no music playing here. The sound of laughter and children screaming is the background music,” said Ito in a tender voice. I could tell that she really loves children.



Ito talking to us about the children.

Changes in problems parents are facing

While touring the facility, we met with Ritsuko Oogami, a clinical psychotherapist who came from Kobe to offer her assistance. Using the experience she gained in the aftermath of the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake, she came to support parents needing advice.

“Five years after the earthquake, I’ve noticed that there is now little difference between problems faced by parents here and those in other parts of the country. When I first came here, the most commonly sought advice was in regard to children not being able to play outside because of the fear of radiation. Nowadays, parents mostly seek advice about interaction with their children.”

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