

## Disaster Overview: “The Worst Flooding in the Heisei Era”

Western Japan was hit by historic rainfalls from 28th June to 8th July 2018, leading to the worst storm-related disaster in the Heisei era. Emergency Warnings for Heavy Rain were issued on 6th July and onward in 11 prefectures, including Hiroshima, Okayama and Ehime. The torrential rain caused river embankments to break; flooding and landslides devastated thousands of homes in their wake. More than 200 lives were lost, nearly 18,000 buildings were totally or partially destroyed as a result.



## Project Overview:

Peace Boat Disaster Relief Volunteer Center (PBV) immediately dispatched expert staff members to the flood affected areas in Fukuoka, Saga and Okayama prefectures for damage assessment while the remaining staff members quickly led nation-wide fundraising campaigns to support the expected relief efforts. In response to the requests from the City of Kurashiki and Kurashiki City Council of Social Welfare, PBV implemented relief projects in the most severely hit area of Mabicho in Kurashiki city, Okayama prefecture. An area of approximately 1,200 hectares was flooded (which is equivalent to a quarter of the town), over 5,000 buildings were damaged and 52 fatalities in Mabicho alone. PBV has been working closely with the local residents and stakeholders in order to facilitate the relief activities to best meet the needs of those affected. Thanks to individual, public and corporate donations and support, PBV has implemented projects in the following areas: Support to Volunteer Center Management (house cleaning/ photo cleaning), Support to Evacuation Center Operation, Support to Community Rebuilding, and Emergency-Relief Coordination.



**Project Location:** Kurashiki City, Okayama Prefecture, Japan

**Project Period:** 9 July 2018 – ongoing

## Volunteer Engagement:

PBV called for volunteers for the relief efforts right after the assessment, and hundreds responded taking part in activities in Kurashiki. In the same way as the PBV’s past relief activities, the volunteering opportunities have been designed to be as accessible as possible, for example, by providing accommodation, gear, tools and language support. Volunteers with diverse backgrounds have come to Kurashiki and joined the PBV’s efforts to rebuild the local communities in the damaged area. Volunteering does not only contribute to the recovery and reconstruction of the affected communities, but also offers valuable learning opportunities to the volunteers to consider their own disaster preparedness. PBV believes this experience will go a long way towards building a more resilient society in the future. Volunteers came from all walks of life,



individuals, schools, companies and institutions all offered a helping hand. Since the beginning of the project, over 500 volunteers have participated in the PBV's activities as of spring 2019. Among them were international volunteers and young leaders who had participated in the disaster relief training program.

### TOMODACHI Initiative Alumni



TOMODACHI Alumni Disaster Resilience Training Program is a program implemented by TOMODACHI Initiative\*, and PBV has been supporting the program as a partner. Five alumni and the alumni manager joined the support activities in Mabicho, Kurashiki-city, from 6<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> August, 2018. They took part in the management of evacuation centers, assessment of needs on the ground, and support activities for evacuees who fled to a local shrine, which served as an unofficial temporary shelter.

Some of the participants shared their volunteering experience in Kurashiki at a reporting session during Shinjuku Bosai Festa (Shinjuku Disaster Prevention Festival) held in early September 2018 in Tokyo and encouraged the younger generation in attendance to take part in volunteering. While the situation in the town has changed as recovery efforts continue, the alumni also returned to Kurashiki as individual volunteers and are actively taking part with PBV. Such positive follow-up from the alumni helped us mobilize and develop networks among the young volunteers.

\*TOMODACHI Initiative is a program led by the United States Embassy in Tokyo and U.S. – Japan council. Please visit their [website](#) for details of the initiative as well as the TOMODACHI Alumni Disaster Resilience Training Program.

### International Volunteers



Back in spring 2011, when the Great East Japan Earthquake occurred, hundreds of volunteers from overseas joined the Japanese volunteers to support the emergency relief activities in Tohoku with PBV. Since then, we have collaborated with multicultural communities in Japan and also with supporters from overseas when major disaster occurred.

At PBV, we respect and value the importance of diversity and inclusion, and have worked with many volunteers from diverse backgrounds over the course of our activities in Kurashiki as well. Volunteers have come from Canada, China, the U.S., Spain, France, Italy, and New Zealand just to name a few. They have offered helping hands in a wide range of relief efforts, from hot meals distribution and evacuation center operations in the earlier phases after the disaster to house cleaning, community building, and, more recently, photo-cleaning. Some volunteers came to Japan for work or study, while others came for travel. Although the reasons that brought them to Japan may differ, they shared the willingness to support those in need and headed to Kurashiki.

Natural disasters are something we cannot avoid as long as we live in Japan, and anyone in the country regardless of the nationalities, may be struck by disasters at one time or another. Working together with international volunteers has offered valuable opportunities to us and other volunteers to reconfirm the importance of mutual help beyond language and cultural differences.

Feedback from the international volunteers has been introduced in the PBV's [website](#) and [Facebook](#) page.



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