

# lets go

## Japan Team

On the 1<sup>st</sup> of July we left for Japan to go and serve the areas that were affected by the tsunami in March this year. We volunteered with a local relief organization CRASH (Christian Relief Assistance Support and Hope). CRASH has been working with victims as well as “clean-up” volunteers since March and they are well acquainted with the procedures of working in disaster areas.

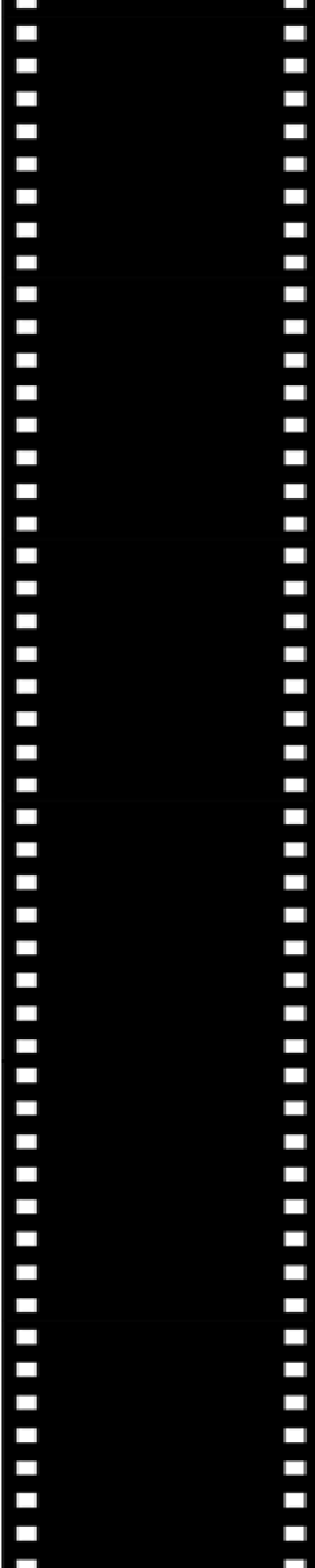
We were placed in Tono in the Iwate prefecture where we worked alongside Japanese and international volunteers through the local centre that has been set up in Tono. We were daily bussed to the coast about an hour and a half away where we physically worked. For the duration of our time in Japan our work included clearing out a drainage system and removal of rubble and septic soil. We planted sunflower seeds which will result in the salt being drawn out of the soil, did carpentry work, therapeutic feet washing and hand rubbing of tsunami victims as well as cleaning of photos that were recovered. We were privileged to see a large part of the coastal strip that was struck by the Tsunami where we encountered many small towns that were left devastated and in ruins in the wake of the destruction.

It was encouraging to be part of an organized professional network of disaster response workers. It is a difficult and long restoration process for the nation of Japan. The destruction is vast but much work has progressed in the past four months. Some of the Japanese volunteers have quit their jobs to help for an extended period of time. Certain companies are contributing by giving their staff paid leave to volunteer and groups of students volunteer during their holidays. It is amazing to see how many different people have joined hands to work together.

Prefab housing has been set up in many areas for victims to move into. Although it is much more basic than what they are used to, it allows families to move out of volunteer centres and into a space of their own. The feeling of the people with regards to these houses is initially quite apprehensive as it means moving into the unknown again and this can be quite disrupting for them. There is still a lot of support, with volunteer and victim centres running. Live music and entertainment as well as small activities during the day at these centres allow a community space for people to come and relax in. Areas for the children to spend time in after school while their parents may take part in other activities are also available and clothing is still being distributed without charge. Convenience stores are being rebuilt and some are already functioning along the coast. This has provided the opportunity for people who are still in the areas to be able to purchase basic necessities and food. Roads have been cleared and traffic moves though easily and effort has been made to replant flowers along the road to bring a sort of colour back amongst the devastation. Progress is certainly moving forward.

There is still a lot of grieving and much work to be done but we believe that many good things are in store for the nation of Japan. The people that we met were very thankful and encouraged to hear that we came from South Africa to work alongside them.





It has been an honour and a privilege to serve Japan and we encourage anyone who has a desire to volunteer to do so.

We have learnt a lot and are looking forward to starting our own disaster response organization. We would like to be able to work alongside local churches responding to natural disasters in the Western Cape including fires, floods and xenophobia. We will use our experience with regards to working amongst and alongside different cultures and organizations.

Thank you for supporting and helping us in this endeavour K. It was so nice to meet you on the airport. The team was truly blessed in Japan and we come back enriched. If you have any questions please let us know.

Kind Regards,

Bernie Treptow

**Letsgo Japan Team**

For more information on volunteer programmes in Japan please contact:  
Jessica Moskoff: [jessicamoskoff@live.com](mailto:jessicamoskoff@live.com)  
Or  
Bernie Treptow: [bernie@visionafrika.com](mailto:bernie@visionafrika.com)