

## **Interview Report on Childcare Systems in Japan**

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### **Abstract**

The effectiveness of childcare systems is frequently being questioned by many. This concern is consistently brought up, especially when it comes to the field of children's mental well-being. Throughout the interview, we have identified several vital vulnerabilities that children recently face: bullying, child abuse, child neglect, and high rates of suicide. On top of this, the number of abuse cases drastically increased towards the end of 2019 as the COVID-19 pandemic started. Our project group has conducted an interview with Swati Mittal, a public health specialist volunteering at Free the Children Japan, in order to develop a further understanding of the current pressing issue of child well-being. In preparation for this interview, our project group prepared five interview questions listed below:

1. In a short statement, what kind of a change do you wish to create through your organization's actions and why is this important to you?
2. In your opinion, what are the most vulnerable issues concerning children in Japan today that need to be tackled?
3. What are some major challenges that your organization faces in the process of achieving your goals?
4. We have several ideas already, such as a Children's Day Celebration for children of the local town and outreach in orphanages with fun activities to broaden the children's creative processes, but we wanted to ask professionals such as yourselves; What do you suggest us as a group of college students to focus on? What else could we achieve?
5. What kind of outreach do you believe would be most effective in achieving our goal?

Through this interview, our project group has gained a more comprehensive understanding of the issue and of the direction our project is heading. Instead of taking a holistic approach towards this problem like our original intention, we decided to take a more targeted approach for this.

*Keywords:* child rights, children well-being, child empowerment, childcare system, youth development

### **Interview Minute**

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Swati Mittal

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Interview conducted on October 13th, 2022 using an online meeting platform.

As part of our IB (International Baccalaureate) CAS (creativity, activity, service) program, we decided to establish a project dedicated to child/youth well-being. In order to deepen our understanding, we have reached out to Free the Children Japan, an organization working for child well-being. As mentioned in the abstract, we have devised five questions which we will be focusing on mainly through the interview. Through the interview, we discussed the problems with the status quo. We first started with a short introduction of everyone in the meeting and moved to the interview questions.

Member of Project Kannon (omitted below to MPK.): In a short statement, what kind of a change do you wish to create through your organization's actions and why is this important to you?

Volunteer at Free the Children Japan (omitted below to VFCJ.): Free the Children Japan holds two main missions: free the children from poverty and discrimination, and free the children from the notion that children can't change the world. So, through our actions and programs, we want to create a society where all the rights of children are protected so that all children can raise their voices and their voices are heard and respected. We would like to create a society where all children are protected from any kind of abuse and violence including bullying.

MPK: In your opinion, what are the most vulnerable issues concerning children in Japan today that need to be tackled?

VFCJ: The most vulnerable issues concerning children in Japan today are: bullying, child abuse, child neglect, and high suicide rates. As we saw in the statistics just now, we can work out that the number of these cases has been increasing. A problem common in many children's lives is the environment they are put in at school. Something we hear a lot about is adults not showing much support to children when they talk about problems like bullying. One of the big reasons for bullying to happen is children not being taught about diversity. I've heard many times from people around me that bullying towards *gaijins* is a big problem. I think this connects to the adult world too. I see the same kind of exclusion happening in workplaces as well.

MPK: What are some major challenges that your organization faces in the process of achieving your goals?

VFCJ: There are definitely lots of problems but if I were to specify one, it would be the fact that adults and children in Japan don't really know much about human rights. Here, children are brought up taught to not bother others. Many people teach moral values but forget to teach their children about his/her own rights. Education on diversity is also lacking. Students who learn about different cultures during their education feel more comfortable and safe with these differences later in their lives and are more confident. Inclusive education allows students of all backgrounds to learn and grow side by side to the benefit of all. Our organization has also had difficulties with the fundraising part to achieve our missions.

MPK: We have several ideas already, such as a Children's Day Celebration for children of the local town and outreach in orphanages with fun activities to broaden the children's creative processes, but we wanted to ask professionals such as yourselves; What do you suggest us as a group of college students to focus on? What else could we achieve?

VFCJ: I think that social involvement with younger children is a good idea. You can do things like having activities in kindergarten schools, giving simple mathematics or science classes to primary school children, and even accompanying children on their picnics or field trips. There are advantages to this. You'd be able to closely observe children for any problems. Children will learn to interact with a person older than them in a friendly way. You'd also be able to learn how to manage different situations with small children and it will help in your self-growth.

MPK: What kind of outreach do you believe would be most effective in achieving our goal?

VFCJ: Free the Children Japan has three approaches for this. We rescue children who are in need. We've already rescued many children in the streets of the Philippines and from the sex market. We work on empowerment for parents, schools, and the community. We also work through advocacy. We are currently trying to make new laws along with the government and are also working to raise awareness of child rights.

VFCJ: And here are a few other solutions that I hoped to share with you. In order to strengthen family economic support, of course, we can work on strengthening household financial security, but we can also work on having more family-friendly policies. For the part about changing social norms for supporting parents and positive parenting, we can have more public engagement and educational campaigns. In order to provide high-quality early care and education, preschools can be more enriched by family engagement and the child care quality can be improved. To help enhance parenting abilities, we can have early childhood home visitations and think of different parenting and family relationship approaches. This can help promote healthy child development. In order to create a more responsive environment and community for children in need, we can enhance primary care, have behavioral parent training programs, and have treatments to lessen harms of abuse and decrease neglect exposure. This can help reduce harms for children and reduce future risks.

### **Project “Kannon”**

According to the Center for Violence Prevention (cdc.gov), Child abuse and neglect are serious public health problems and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). They can have long-term impacts on health, opportunity, and well-being. This issue includes all types of abuse and neglect of a child under the age of 18 by a parent, caregiver, or another person in a custodial role (such as a religious leader, a coach, or a teacher) that results in harm, the potential for harm, or threat of harm to a child. Chronic abuse may result in toxic stress, which can change brain development and increase the risk for problems like posttraumatic stress disorder and learning, attention, and memory difficulties.

Our project was established by a group of students from UWC ISAK Japan whom all hail from diverse backgrounds. We are determined in our mission to perform meaningful and productive work through our project. We believe it is of our imperative to bridge connections between children in need and the local community, and above all to raise awareness to critical issues surrounding the matter of child rights, welfare, and more.

We envision a society where children’s well-being and development are a priority. We will accomplish this by bridging children in need with potential benefactors, as well as, hosting workshops and other events as means to advocate for our cause and fundraising platforms.

Through the interview, our project group was able to gain a further understanding of the entire scope. We have reached the conclusion to combat this problem at an early stage of children/youth development. We took initiative to try form a connection between children/youths and the community so that if a child/youth is in need of help, they have a community they can reach out to for help. As our school is located in Karuizawa, Nagano prefecture, we decided to start our project activities on a smaller scale within the Karuizawa local community.

We have also decided to make use of our very diverse community to combat the problem of children/youths not having much exposure to diversity. There are people from over 80 different countries in our school and even within our project group, we have representation of

six different countries. We plan on making effective use of our community to promote diversity not only within Japan but also from other countries abroad to the children/youths in Karuizawa.

The most recent upcoming event will be the Children's Day Festival that will be held on November 20th, in the UWC ISAK Japan campus, in light of the international children's day. In this event, we will be collaborating with other project groups working on different causes to open workshops for children/youths to help them look beyond what they already know. We will be having pottery and indigo dying sessions in order to help people embrace traditional Japanese culture, a traditional Ukrainian painting workshop led by a Ukrainian peer to help raise awareness on international issues and, we will be having a collaborative skateboard session for participants to enjoy skateboarding with people of diverse backgrounds. We will be holding more events like these in the future to slowly combat the looming problem of prejudice and to help remove preconceptions towards diversity.

In order to make this project something sustainable, we plan to eventually develop this project into something larger scaled to combat this problem in more places.



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Project “Kannon”: <https://2024emilebrozaityte.wixsite.com/project-kannon>