IMAGE ESSAY

“Handing spirits to the future”: memorial services for the Great Hanshin–Awaji Earthquake

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At 05:46 a.m. on January 17, 1995, the Great Hanshin–Awaji Earthquake occurred, killing 6,434 people and injuring 43,792. Every year on January 17, memorial services have been held in stricken areas. In the Hanazono district, where many houses were completely destroyed, the lessons from the disaster are utilized in community development for disaster preparedness (Sakashita & Uchinuno, 2015). The memorial service, named “handing spirits to the future,” is held every year on the former site where the district’s temporary housing was located as an effort to communicate the experience to posterity, to prepare for future disasters, and for regional linkage (Fig. 1). It was also held this year, 2017. From 05:00 a.m., 700 candles were lit one after the other. At exactly 05:46 a.m., a silent prayer was then held, followed by words from survivors about the lessons learned and their wishes for the future. Then, requiems were played by the younger generation (Fig. 2). Ms. Matsumoto, who represents the Volunteer Hanazono group, and who organized the services, said “I will never forget that day. It taught me that disasters can occur anytime, anywhere, striking anyone. We should develop a community that creates no disaster victims.” After the disaster, survivors established a volunteer group in their community. Members cooperate with each other and use their ingenuity to help develop the community under the concept of being “a community that creates no disaster victims.” They started home visit activities, a registration system for those needing help, health consultations, recruiting and training of volunteers, and a safety confirmation system for those living alone, the elderly, and residents vulnerable in an emergency.

Ms. Nagasaka, Chief of the Bokai Home Care Support

Figure 1 The scene from the memorial service named “handing spirits to the future”.

Figure 2 Requiems were played by the younger generation.

Center, who is a nurse as well a member of “Volunteer Hanazono,” told her story. The starting point of her job was the Great Hanshin–Awaji Earthquake. Her first mission was to provide support for those living in temporary housing. She found many people who needed medical care. At the same time, she met many local people who became energetically involved in their activities, as they were inspired to help others after the earthquake. Until then, she had thought it was medical

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and nursing care that cured diseases. However, she discovered that local activities such as meeting for tea, visiting temporary housing and preparing meals together had a power beyond medical and nursing care that could also help patients recover from what ailed them. She told of the five important roles of nursing workers for community development. These are: (a) protecting life, (b) coordination, (c) educational support on health, (d) acting together with community members, and (e) endorsing local activities. She is a volunteer lecturer of the life-support class on Sundays, which is held every month for the community. Her new challenge is developing many assembly facilities within walking distance of every elderly person. She believes that meeting people face-to-face is the best way to confirm

each other's safety.

The matter in question is how to hand the spirit of helping each other against the disaster to the younger generation who have not experienced it. As one way of expressing this spirit, memorial events like this are held everywhere in the Hanshin–Awaji area.

Key words: memorial service, Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake, community development, role of nurse

REFERENCE

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