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When I was asked to participate in this program, I was immediately excited by the prospects of seeing the "real America," seeing more than I would have as a mere tourist, and observing the source of America's immeasurable power. And during the trip, I believe I was able to see American democracy at work. I was both moved and surprised by the extent to which nonprofit organizations (NPOs) play an important role in that country and by their power to influence government. What we call democracy in Japan seems so shallow compared to what I witnessed in the United States. An encouraging fact is that, as it is Japan, the majority of NPOs in the United States are run by women. These women have had a long history of addressing the problems of discrimination and other issues facing women since they began entering professional careers. (I was told that the status of women in Japan today is comparable to American women 50 years ago.) The fact that women in the United States now enjoy many rights because they fought long and hard for them is encouraging. I believe the same scenario is possible for Japanese women if we continue in our efforts.

Los Angeles

Project Info Community Services

Project Info Community Services (PICS) has been active in addressing problems in the Latino-American community for over 20 years. They believe that strong family relationships are the best way to combat the recent problems facing this group such as drug abuse, alcoholism, and child abuse. In response to these issues, PICS has designed specific programs aimed at improving communication among family members. One such program, using a small stuffed bear, seemed appropriate for solving the type of communication problems which are now beginning to threaten Japanese families as well. It will be a long time, however, before people in Japan can open up to new ideas and solutions helping to solve family problems. The programs which PICS operates are all quite entertaining and do not impose ideas on the participants as similar programs might in Japan. In this regard, I was able to see a good example of an effective educational program.

Foley House Shelter for Women

Foley House is designed to help women who are fighting alcohol and drug abuse and/or who have been abused by their husbands or other men (shockingly, half the women in America claim to have experienced such abuse). Before visiting the facility, I had expected Foley House to be quite dismal, but what I saw was nothing like what I had imagined. A big modern building provides facilities to accommodate women and their children. Coming from Japan where the housing situation is far from ideal, I envied the size of the accommodations. The women live at Foley House in a very home-like atmosphere, while trying to recover to the point where they are able to live in the outside world again. I met a girl who, although she appeared to be only in her teens, already had several children and was trying to overcome her problems with alcohol abuse. I sincerely wish her the best.

Although there must be similar stories in Japan, they are not always heard. In contrast, people in the United States recognize their problems and try to find solutions. I believe there is a strong need to do the same in Japan. I was also reminded of the few shelters which were built in Japan recently, and their inadequate facilities made me realize that for NPOs to operate effective programs sufficient funds are required in addition to the spirit of volunteerism.

NPOs are involved in addressing all kinds of problems in the United States. In a country where women's rights appear to be well established, many groups continue to work on improving the status of women in business, government, and society in general. I was overwhelmed by the strong motivation shown by these women who are many steps ahead of Japanese women. In talking to professors at the University of Southern California, I learned about problems which result from American-style individualism, where the government does not interfere in the affairs of an individual. One example is that there are hardly any public day-care centers, and what few that do exist are mostly run by NPOs. On the other hand, this same individualism and lack of government interference has also created a society where 40 percent of Americans spend more than five hours a week in the volunteer activities of some seven million NPOs. The role of NPOs in the United States is much greater than we expected.

Spokane

Northwest Regional Facilitators

For me, visiting Northwest Regional Facilitators (NRF) in Spokane was the most interesting part of our trip. Spokane is a beautiful, small city of 180,000 people. I was encouraged by, and envious of, the fact that the mayor of the city is a woman who once was affiliated with an NPO, and that 40 percent of the state assembly is comprised of women. One reason I found NRF to be so wonderful was that it is a people-oriented organization, and it serves as a mechanism for citizens to become involved in the community. Because we citizens do not have a well-established relationship with the government in Japan, I found it wonderful that

there is a great deal of collaboration between NPOs and the state and municipal governments in the United States. Moreover, I was surprised to hear that most of the NPOs' operational funds come from public sources, something which is almost unheard of in Japan. I also visited the Lindaman Nonprofit Center, a building operated by NRF where various NPOs maintain small offices and share other facilities in the building, cooperating and collaborating with each other.

In Spokane, I also experienced a homestay and fulfilled another objective of my trip: to learn about the lifestyle of working women in the United States. By witnessing the role that men play in the home, I understood how women are able continue working after marriage and childbirth. The husbands help in the kitchen and look after the children, seemingly spending more time than the wives in doing household chores. I jokingly said that I wanted to take an American husband home as a souvenir. Japanese men, by comparison, seem incapable of performing household duties, perhaps because they are taught a gender-based division of labor at an early age, and because they tend to work very long hours on the job. Recently, however, male and female roles are beginning to change among the younger generation in Japan. I am awaiting the day when, as in the United States, husband and wife will both be able to enjoy family life.

Chicago

Chinese-American Service League

I saw the potential of the Chinese-American community at work when I observed various programs at the Chinese-American Service League, which helps Chinese immigrants adjust to life in the United States. Job training and placement, counseling, care centers for children and senior citizens, English language training, and regular health check-ups are only a few of the many services they provide to the community. This is made possible by their many volunteers, capable professional staff, and sufficient funding. I learned here, as I did from Project Info in Los Angeles and NRF in Spokane, that NPOs are not able to grow unless they are staffed by professionals, nor are they operate effectively without adequate funding. Japanese NPOs do not have the experience necessary to raise funds, and thus their activities are limited. With more funds it would be possible to do more, and therefore Japanese NPOs need to experiment with different fund-raising techniques.

At the Art Institute of Chicago, I spent an amazingly relaxing time looking at wonderful works of art. These works made me realize how short life is but also how important it is to live it one step at a time, and at the same time, without hesitation.

I have mentioned only a few of the places we visited. Returning from the trip, I have been relating to others what I experienced. In July, three colleagues from the Kanagawa Network Movement unsuccessfully ran for election to the House of Representatives. I had spoken on the relationship between the government and NPOs in support of these candidates. I was disappointed by the outcome of the election and this made me realize the lack of influence held by our organizations.

However, this is only the beginning. We will continue with our efforts and work to build a stronger NPO network and contribute in any way possible to the creation of a better society in Japan.

Finally, I would like to express my deep gratitude to the American NPOs, IIE, JCIE, and the Center for Global Partnership for letting me take part in this wonderful program.