

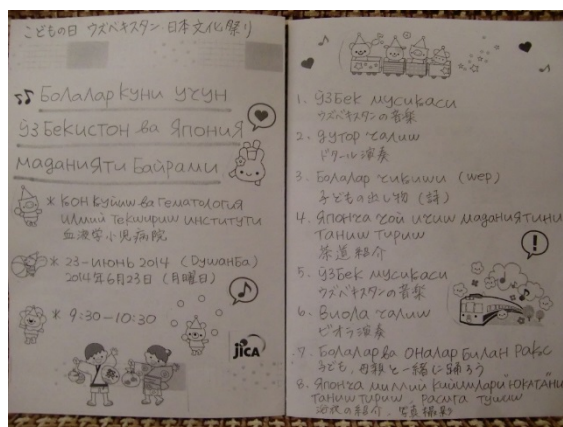
International Cooperation Activity in Uzbekistan Chisako WAKAMATSU (Uzbekistan)

Some seven months have passed since I began to work at the Children's Hospital of Hematology on February 17, 2014 as a young volunteer member for 50 children aged between 0 and 15 receiving in-hospital treatment for cancers (mainly leukemia).

Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan, is very comfortable to live in. Although I sometimes find it difficult to improve my proficiency in Uzbek, the language I use for working in this country, and have some trouble communicating with local people, many of them are friendly enough to spend time and patience to try to understand what I'm saying. As time goes along, warm relationships are being established between the children and me. For example, many children at the hospital wait for me in front of the playroom, carrying colored paper in their arms, before 9:00 a.m., when the playroom is opened. Also, when I'm putting on my uniform after arriving at the hospital, many children come to me, saying "Charosuopa," which is what I am called in this country. In addition, patients' mothers and other caregivers now more frequently ask me to play with the children in their rooms. Besides, I now share with my co-workers much painfulness and sadness, sometimes at the deaths of children, which is inevitable at the hospital, as well as joyfulness and satisfaction, such as when watching the children grow.

In Uzbekistan, the government decides the theme for each year, depending on its priority policy. The year 2014 is the year of children's health. In addition, in this country, June 1 is Children's Day. In this regard, meeting the needs of the hospital, I organized and held the first Children's Day – Uzbekistan and Japanese Cultural Festival.

While Children's Day in Japan is on May 5, Children's Day in Uzbekistan is on June 1. It is extremely important to celebrate the growth of children fighting with cancers, in terms of supporting these children and their mothers and other caregivers. There is a limit to what children with diseases are allowed to do. If they can experience international exchange and learn about Japanese culture at an event through young overseas cooperation



A program list was distributed to each participant. On the back of the list is an explanation of how to make a folded-paper crane, as well as how to make Baumkuchen, which we provided on the day of the event, using locally available ingredients.

volunteer members, such an event will act as a good opportunity to extend their relationships with other people and to stimulate an international mindset. Also, this will promote their sound mental and physical growth.

Patients' mothers and other caregivers staying in the hospital together with the patients must be immensely tired from providing care every day. One of the purposes of the event that I organized was to provide them with a relaxing time.

As the coordinator of the event, I was engaged in planning, coordination, preparation, and implementation of the event. One of the reasons that I decided to introduce Japanese culture was that many local people have a strong image of Oriental people through Korean and Chinese people. Actually, even though I told local people that I'm Japanese, they sometimes soon forgot it. To present a concrete image of Japan, I made a demonstration of the traditional way of serving Japanese tea. Meanwhile, almost all people in Uzbekistan—young and old men and women—love music and dancing. To give children and their mothers and other caregivers relaxing moments, at the event,

volunteer members studying the *dutar*, a musical instrument, gave a performance, and music volunteers played the viola. The performance of Uzbek music and poems was incorporated into the event program as a result of a proposal from the childcare worker at the hospital who heard about the theme of the event. The event came to a successful end, thanks to the volunteer members who gave the music performance, introduced Japanese culture, and kept a record of the event, the childcare worker's friend (local citizen) who acted as the event MC



Wearing *doppi*, the traditional Uzbek cap, and costumes made from traditional *adras* cloth, JICA volunteers and other people involved with JICA played the *dutar*, a traditional Uzbek musical instrument. You can study the instrument at the Uzbekistan-Japan Human Resources Development Center (Japan Foundation), located in Tashkent, the country's capital.

and sound operator, my co-workers who agreed to the event and helped me with venue preparation, the children and their mothers and other caregivers who gave a warm welcome to Japanese volunteers in anticipation for the event, and many other people. Since the temperature in Tashkent in June is above 30°C almost every day, I was thinking about holding the event not in the hospital's garden (outdoors), but in a small

playroom. As a result of a discussion with a doctor, however, the doctor recommended me to hold the event outdoors, unless it would go on for a long time. Feeling impressed with the warmth of my co-workers, who provided me with much support and tried to understand what I was saying in my awkward Uzbek, I recognized the difficulty of sharing a common image through a language. Thus I learned a lot through the event.

At the event, while giving some explanation, I served participants Japanese green tea and confectionery. Their comments after sampling them included the following: “The tea is a little bitter, but it tastes good,” and “Give me another of the sweets!” After the event, carrying *yukata* (informal cotton *kimono*) for children and adults, and *origami*, I visited the hospital rooms of all the children who could not participate in the outdoor event because of their medical treatment together with other volunteer staff. I helped the children and their mothers and caregivers put on the *yukata*, took commemorative photos, folded the *origami* into cranes and balloons, and presented the craft. Although about three hours passed before I knew it, I was able to fulfill the original purpose of visiting the patients’ rooms, providing emotional care for the children and their mothers and other caregivers, as well as helping them feel closer to the Japanese people and Japanese culture. In the playroom, I usually interact with the same children, so I was worried that I had not established a close relationship with all the children. However, my visit to the patients’ rooms enabled me to share significant time with them through the experience of Japanese culture.

I was very pleased to see that some mothers and other caregivers in their *yukata* looked very happy, though somewhat embarrassed, saying “I’m like *Oshin* (the name of the heroine in a Japanese serialized drama)!” Children asked me many questions, such as “This is very fun. When is the next festival?” and “What do the Japanese people coming to me today usually do in Uzbekistan?” Showing a strong interest in the event and also in Japan, they seemed to be enjoying themselves very much. I was relieved that all the children, their mothers and other caregivers and my co-workers had a fun time with joyful smiles.



After the event, I presented event photographs to the children and their mothers and other caregivers, and also secured an opportunity for the children to write letters of appreciation to the volunteer members participating in the event and to review the event. Through this activity, I wanted to encourage children to cherish the custom of expressing their appreciation for what has been done for them, rather than regarding it as a matter of course. Thus, I always try to ensure that my activities for children help them to cultivate good manners. When asked to draw pictures, the children drew the Japanese national flag, or wrote “JICA” on their pictures. I guess this was partly because I put “Japan” into the title of the event, and also because I distributed program lists with the JICA logo on them. However, the main reason was that Japanese volunteer members interacted closely with the children, which must have impressed them very strongly.