

Hope of Futaba

Journalism School – Team 1



Step by Step Toward Revitalization

Interview with Futaba Project

FPJ is a community-building company established in March 2019. Its main mission is to connect people both inside and outside Futaba Town. The goal is to increase the number of people moving in and to create a future where both returnees and newcomers can live happily together.

FPJ's office is located in the building of *Kyu-Sannomiyado Tanaka Iin* (the former Tanaka Clinic) in Futaba Town. The building has a long history of 103 years; it was built in 1922, and registered as a National Tangible Cultural Property in June 2022 after surviving the Great East Japan Earthquake. With support from a town subsidy, FPJ renovated the building and opened it in November 2024 as a consultation center for relocation and settlement. Using an old building instead of a new one lets the staff talk with visitors about the town's historic buildings and what the town was like before the disaster.

FPJ also helps organize and operate local events and actively shares information about the town. The "FUTABA Art District," where murals are painted on the walls of buildings, began after the disaster to bring light and hope back to the hearts of the townspeople. The murals depict the smiling faces of people connected to the town.

At "FUTAHOME," a local community hub, different shops open depending on the day and time, and various events are held. Once a month, a gathering called "FUTABA wo HOME-au Kai" is held, where residents meet and interact. "Home" has two meanings — the Japanese word 'homeru' (meaning 'to praise') and the English home ("hometown"). Mr. Miyuki Ishii, 87, who returned to Futaba Town last year and takes part in the event, said, "I love Futaba. I've always been proud that it's a town of learning and culture."

There is also a board at FUTAHOME where anyone can write down ideas of what they want to do. It helps residents talk more with each other and strengthen their bonds.

The staff of FPJ also introduce the town at the old Futaba Station building. Even after the new station was completed and train service resumed, the old station remains as a community space where anyone can drop by and relax.

One feature that stands out is the pink "Door of Hope." People can open the door saying "I'm home!" and take commemorative photos. On August 30, 2022, when the evacuation order for the town's Specified Reconstruction and Revitalization Base Areas (SRRBA)



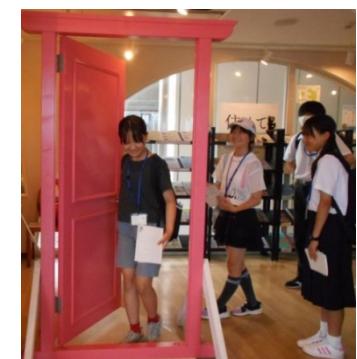
The former Tanaka Clinic, now used as the office of FPJ. It also serves as a consultation center for relocation and settlement, and as a place where people can meet and connect.



The message board at "FUTAHOME," a local community activity hub



"FUTABA Art District," where murals of smiling people connected to Futaba Town are painted on building walls. The artworks created so far can be viewed on the website of the art collective OVER ALLs.



The "Door of Hope" installed at the old Futaba Station. It was used in the town's homecoming event, where residents opened the door saying "I'm home."



The Futaba Fire Brigade Station, where the clock stopped at 14:46, the time when the earthquake occurred

Evacuation Order Lifted, Traditional Festival Revived

In 2011, because of the Great East Japan Earthquake and TEPCO's Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station accident, about 7,100 residents of Futaba Town had to evacuate to places outside the town. Eleven years later, in August 2022, the evacuation order for the town's SRRBA was lifted, and residents began to return. The area where the order was lifted covers about 15% of the town's total land, and now 185 people live there. Many traces of the disaster still remain in the town. For example, the shutter of the warehouse of the Second Fire Brigade in Futaba is still bent. At the time of the earthquake, when firefighters tried to take out the fire engine to call for evacuation, the power was out and the electric shutter wouldn't open, so they had to break through it with the vehicle.

At the same time, the town is actively holding festivals to increase the population and bring back its liveliness.

In January 2023, the Daruma Market was revived.

The highlight of the festival is a tug-of-war between the North and South teams, with a huge 600-kilogram daruma doll in the center. It is said that the result decides the fortune of the year—if the North wins, the year will bring a good harvest; if the South wins, it will bring success in business.

With the revival of the festival, townspeople were happy to see Futaba become lively again.

"Sharing Smiles from Futaba Town"

Interview with Ms. Mihoko Yamane from FPJ

Q: Do you find your work rewarding?

A: Many people from outside the town don't have a good image of the town. So when they say things like "It was fun," I feel really happy. And when they leave with a smile, it makes me even happier.

Q: What are some challenges FPJ is facing now?

A: Some people come for relocation consultations, but the problem is that there are still very few houses available for people to live in within Futaba Town.

Q: What can we do to help?

A: You can tell your family and friends about Futaba. If more people hear about it, they may think, "Futaba sounds nice," or "I want to visit there." I'd be very happy if many people come again and again and grow to love Futaba Town.



Ms. Yamane, who guided us around Futaba Town

★Editor's Note

"I love Futaba. I'm relieved and happy to be back." From the words of Ms. Yamane, who guided us around Futaba Town, and from the townspeople we met, we could feel their strong passion for the town's revitalization.

Keeping in mind what we learned during our reporting, we will tell the people around us about it. Spreading the charms of the town to more people may encourage evacuees to return and newcomers to settle here. There is still more we can do.

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