Leap of faith lands gymnasts medals, more at Tokyo competition

By Dan Bowen, CFAY Public Affairs

All families who forward-deploy to Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka (CFAY) are forced to make sacrifices. Whether it's changing jobs, schools, and friends or just having to give up going to their favorite restaurants, adjusting to life overseas can be a tough transition. But as the English churchman Robert South once said, "Problems can become opportunities when the right people come together."

This was certainly the case for two families living on board Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka (CFAY). Last year, Sara, (8) and Ryan Holloway (11), arrived in Japan hoping to continue competing in gymnastics at a level comparable to what they had been doing back in the United States. Mackenzie (11), Emily, (8) and John Wood (6) had been participating in the CFAY Morale, Welfare and Recreation (MWR) program but were forced to look elsewhere for a coach when the program was shut down.

Ryan had been competing in the USA Gymnastics circuit for years before his father was forward-deployed to Yokosuka. Having seen a competitive Japanese team from Yokosuka at a meet in the United States, he and his mother knew there was a competitive gymnastics team in Yokosuka, but finding it and being accepted into the program was a different matter all together. But, thanks to some help from MWR, they were able to learn about a competitive gymnastics teacher, Tetsuo Maeda, who ran a program just 30 minutes away from the base.

"We had been staying in the Navy Lodge and we had to contact MWR to communicate to get us there. I didn't even have a driver's license to get out in town," said Christina Holloway, Ryan's mother. "They took me and the kids with a driver and a translator to visit the gym and to meet [Maeda]."

Speaking through the translator, Maeda told the Holloways that he would let the kids come back the next day and train for four hours. As nerve racking as it was for Ryan's mother trying to find her way back to the gym and communicate in a language she had absolutely no familiarity with, it was much worse for Ryan. He broke out in hives on his way to his first class.

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Coach Tetsuo Maeda, poses with his gymnastics team after the Tokyo Junior Gymnastics Competition at the Kitanogawa Gym Aug. 14. His team included five CFAY residents who took home six medals helping Maeda's team take home more medals than any other team in the competition.

Photo by Christina Holloway

NIOC Sailors host COMREL event for Japanese mothers, children

Story and photo by Yoko Kato, CNFJ Public Affairs

Under the scorching heat, Cryptological Technician (Technical) 1st Class Matthew Bovetz introduced himself and provided bottles of cold water to Japanese children and mothers at the main gate of Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka (CFAY) Aug. 21. To ensure that they didn't get dehydrated from the heat, he escorted them inside the base. Soon they were taken to the base bowling center via the cool air-conditioned van that was arranged for them.

The seven mothers and their 14 children who came to the base reside in a welfare facility located in Kanagawa Prefecture.

"Today, we are hosting a bowling party for them," said Bovetz, one of the volunteers from Naval Information Operations Command (NIOC) First Class Petty Officers' Association (FCPOA). "We want them to enjoy American food – pizza and chicken wings and enjoy bowling."

Since 1998, NIOC has been providing helping hands and numerous events to the facility on a periodic basis. Currently, about 30 children reside in the facility with their mothers for various reasons; some were forced to escape from abusive fathers, others for financial reasons.

"Our command has had a relationship with the facility for many years," said Cmdr. Niels F. Mateo, commanding officer of NIOC. "Our First Class Petty Officers' Association plans and executes a simple activity with them at least once a quarter. The kids really like it and the interaction provides our command members an opportunity to give something back to a community that has given us so much."

Naval Information Operations Command (NIOC) volunteers mingle with their guests at the MWR Bowling Center on board Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka during a community relations event for a welfare facility Aug. 21. NIOC has been providing helping hands and numerous events to the facility on a periodic basis since 1998.

Some Japanese volunteer interpreters including 16-year old Sunao Kato were there for language support as the American volunteers didn't speak much Japanese and the children can't speak English.

"Though my English is not perfect, I am glad I am here to help," Kato said.

The language barrier didn't seem to be a problem for the American volunteers and Japanese children. As soon as one small child received a piggyback ride from a tall American man, other kids asked other American men to give them piggyback rides too.

A 6-foot-3-inch tall volunteer, Cryptological Technician (Technical) 1st Class Jed Morris, acting president of the NIOC FCPOA, was repeatedly asked to give the "highest piggyback."

"We enjoy doing it very much," said Morris. "I don't speak Japanese, they don't speak English. So, they were hesitant at the beginning but we could still have fun and enjoy. If they are happy, we are happy."

At the end of the nearly three-hour event, the welfare facility's senior staff member Daisuke Kawasaki expressed his appreciation to the NIOC volunteers for their time and generosity.

"The mothers and children were looking forward to this event for a long time," he said. "We are very grateful to the NIOC volunteers who always provide such an opportunity to enable us to share enjoyable times together."

米海軍情報運用群、日本の子供たちをボウリング・パーティへ招待

文・写真：加藤葉子、CNFJ 広報部

8月21日、焼け付くような太陽の下、マテュー・ボベッツ一等兵曹は基地正門で、母親に付き添われた日本の子供たちの前で自己紹介し、冷たい水を配っていた。脱水状態にならない様気を配りつつ、ボベッツ一等兵曹は彼らを基地の中へ案内した。すぐに彼の所属部隊、米海軍情報運用群が母子たちの為に手配したエアコンの効いた涼しい車に乗せて基地内のボウリング場へ向かった。

この日、基地にやってきたのは7人の母親と14人の子供たち。彼らは皆、神奈川県にある某福祉施設に入居している。

「今日、僕たちは施設の皆さんの為にボウリング・パーティを主催したのです。アメリカの食べ物、ピザやチキンを食べながら、ボウリングを楽しんでもらいたいと思っています」と、ボベッツ一等兵曹。米海軍情報運用群には、一等兵曹を中心として構成されたボランティア・グループがあり、彼もその一員である。

1998年以来、米海軍情報運用群は同施設に対する支援活動を続けており、入居する母子の為に定期的に様々なイベントを企画・実施している。現在、同施設では約30名の子供たちが母親と一緒に生活をしている。暴力的な父親や夫から逃れる為、経済的な理由など、その入居理由は様々である。

米海軍情報運用群司令官のニール・F・マテオ中佐は、同施設との交流について以下の様に話してくれた。

「皆さんとは、もう何年もお付き合いさせて頂いています。私たちの部隊の一等兵曹会が中心となり、四半期に一度の割合で入居者の皆さんを対象にしたイベントを企画・実施しています。子供たちは喜んでくれていますし、隊員たちにとっても、子供たちとの交流を通して、自分達を受け入れてくれている日本の地域社会に恩返しができる良い機会となっているのです」

彼らは共に昼食を取りながらボウリングを楽しんだ。アメリカ人隊員はあまり日本語が話せず、日本の子供たちは英語が話せない。その為、この日は何人かのボランティア通訳が参加したが、その一人、加藤直さん（16歳）は感想をこう話してくれた。「僕の英語は完璧ではありませんが、今日はここでお手伝できて嬉しいです」

だが彼には、アメリカ人ボランティアと日本の子供たちとの間には言葉の壁などまったく無い様に感じられた。一人の子供がアメリカ人男性に肩車をされている姿を見て他の子供たちも他のアメリカ人男性に肩車をせがむ。190センチの長身のボランティア、一等兵曹会会長代行ジェド・モリス一等兵曹は、何度も子供たちに「一番高い肩車」をせがまれていた。

「こうした活動をする事はとても楽しいです。僕は日本語が話せず、彼らは英語が話せない為、子供は最初少しためらいがちですが、こうして一緒に楽く有意義な時間を過ごす事ができます。彼らが喜んでくれると僕らも嬉しいです」と、モリス一等兵曹。

笑顔と楽しい笑い声は約3時間ほど続いた。パーティ終了にあたり同施設で幹部指導員を務める河崎大輔氏は、ボランティアたちに感謝の言葉を述べた。「お母さんたちも子供たちも、このイベントをずっと心待ちにしていました。皆様には、一緒に楽しい時を過ごす事ができるこの様な機会を与えてくださり、心から感謝しています。」