

# Helping Hands

With the Women's Group support, two Tokyo-based charities are able to assist sick children and their families.

by Tim Hornyak

**O**n a quiet backstreet away from the Yamanote Line tracks in Tokyo's Meguro district, three people work in a ground-floor office, a dry cleaner's sign above the door. But they aren't pressing shirts. In fact, they're not even being paid for their efforts.

The trio are volunteers at one of Japan's few nonprofit organizations (NPO) aimed at helping children with incurable diseases. A Dream a Day in Tokyo is dedicated to providing sick kids with memorable experiences, and it recently received a ¥500,000 donation from the Club's Women's Group.

Wako Taguchi is an 11-year-old girl from Ibaraki whose lot in life has been overwhelmingly difficult. She was born with a form of cerebral palsy called spastic quadriplegia that has left her muscles stiff and jerky. She's unable to move and confined to a bed. In addition to a painful spinal cord disorder called syringomyelia, she also suffers from respiratory failure and requires constant life support.

In August 2012, at age 8, Wako left her home and went somewhere that wasn't the hospital for the first time in her life. She was taken on a trip to Tokyo, where volunteers from A Dream a Day greeted her and brought her to Tokyo Disneyland on the outskirts of the capital.

From her bed, with a respirator tucked beneath a pink polka-dot blanket, she toured the theme park and had her photo taken with Mickey Mouse. The five-day



Yoko Ueda and Yachiyo Eguchi

Yuki Kite



A Dream a Day trip to Tokyo Disneyland

trip that also took in Disney Sea and Shinagawa Aquarium was an unforgettable odyssey for her entire family.

"With the support of many volunteers, we were able to go on a trip that was like a grand adventure," says Wako's mother, Sayuri Taguchi. "As a mother, I was very moved to see her understanding and enjoying the attractions at Tokyo Disneyland. We were able to make lifelong memories with everyone's help."

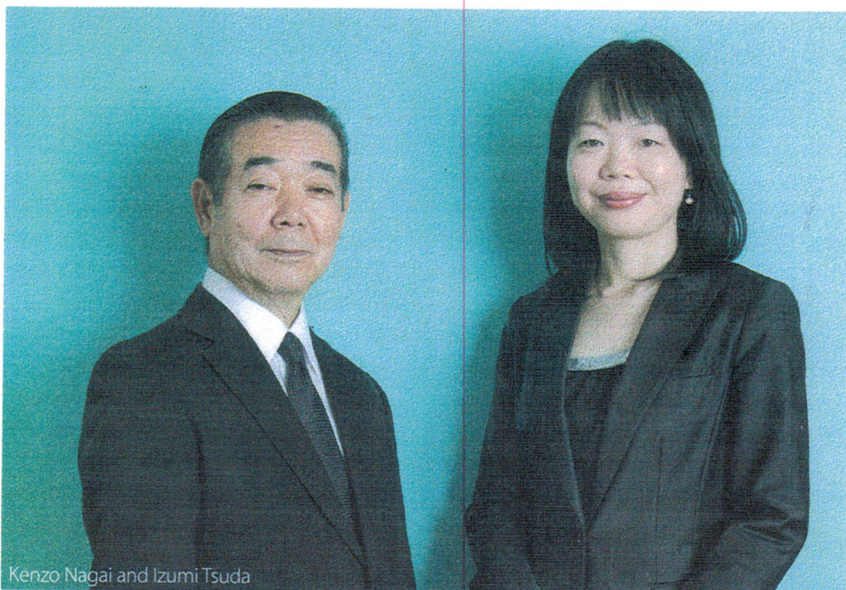
A Dream a Day was founded in 2009 by a man with no previous charity work experience or history of helping ill children. Kenzo Nagai sold educational programs to companies until his retirement and then found that there was a need to help the country's 110,000 children with incurable diseases (the government recognizes more than 500 such conditions).

"I saw many such groups to help kids when I went to the US on business, but there were none like that here in Japan," Nagai says.

A Dream a Day focuses on children in the terminal phase of their illnesses, transporting them for free to stay in Tokyo and visit Disneyland or another destination in the Tokyo area. Some youngsters meet celebrities or participate in such activities as cooking workshops. It's often an emotional experience for all involved, especially the parents who care for their children day in, day out. The NPO tries to assist about 10 families each year and relies on donations from companies, individuals and organizations like the Club.

Another foundation that the Women's Group is helping is Family House.





Kenzo Nagai and Izumi Tsuda

Based in Kanda Sudacho, near Tokyo's Akihabara electronics quarter, Family House runs a network of low-cost accommodations for families who have to travel to Tokyo for medical treatment for their children.

Established by Dr Mutsuhiro Ohira in 1991, the nonprofit began offering rooms in Shibuya to families the following year. In 1993, it opened Kangaroo House, a five-room dwelling in Chofu City that was donated by a local family. Other accommodations, many named after animals, opened over the years.

The NPO currently has 12 facilities, with a total of 58 rooms in the Tokyo area, some within walking distance of hospitals. The rooms are furnished and come with appliances and kitchenware. There's a minimal fee of ¥1,000 per person per night—instituted because many users want to contribute something. Often, however, parents benefit in other ways, too.

"I will never forget the things that happened at Family House while I was in Tokyo for my daughter's second operation," a mother from Shizuoka told the NPO. "I threw out my back and couldn't even get up. The owner's wife took care of me and even prepared food for me. In the end, she made all the preparations when I was taken to the emergency room by ambulance. She treated me as family. Even when I was depressed and felt foolish for having fallen, she inspired me with a graceful sense of humor."

Over the past 25 years, Family House has helped more than 15,000 families

who have traveled to Tokyo for treatment for chronic childhood illnesses, such as cancer and heart conditions. It relies on a network of room managers and volunteers to keep the facilities clean, an especially important task given that many of the children have compromised immune systems. Family House is dependent upon donations, such as the ¥1 million recently provided by the Women's Group.

"Helping children and their families who are less fortunate, whether it be providing medical or emotional care and support, is one of the three focus areas of the Women's Group charitable activities," says the Women's Group's Therese Cowled. "A Dream a Day and Family House do important work in this area for our community, and we are honored to be able to provide them with financial support."

"In addition to our volunteer housecleaning, we hire professionals to ensure a safe environment for users, and that's where donations from Tokyo American Club can really help," says Family House trustee Yoko Ueda. "We can never forget Club Members' longtime support. We are very grateful and hope it will continue for the sake of children fighting chronic illnesses." □

Hornyak is a Tokyo-based freelance journalist.

#### A Dream a Day in Tokyo

[www.guesthouse.or.jp](http://www.guesthouse.or.jp)

#### Family House

[www.familyhouse.or.jp](http://www.familyhouse.or.jp)

## Carols and Champagne

by Nick Jones

Junko Sato has performed publicly dozens of times, but singing at the Women's Group's annual year-end celebration is particularly special for her.

It was while attending the Christmas luncheon in 2002 that she first heard the British Embassy Choir (now known as the Tokyo Embassy Choir). The recital helped to reignite her passion for music and singing. She auditioned and joined the choir as a soprano the following year.

Since then, Sato has performed at the luncheon a number of times. "It has always been a joy over the years to share our love of music with the ladies and to invite them to sing a few carols [with us]," she says.

Fellow Club Member Claire Salles joined the choir recently. "I enjoy singing a wide variety of music in a convivial atmosphere with international and Japanese people who have strong musical skills," she says. "By performing at this annual luncheon, I will be happy to share my passion for choral music with TAC Members and participate in celebrating Christmastime with them."

Besides choral entertainment, the Champagne event will honor those Members who have been part of the Women's Group for more than 10 years.

#### Monthly Program:

#### Holiday Cheer and Champagne

Monday, December 7

11:30 a.m. (doors open: 11 a.m.)

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Women's Group members: ¥3,000

Non-Women's Group members: ¥4,000

Sign up online or at Member Services

Prices exclude 8 percent consumption tax.

