The Silver Lining

Sawayaka Well-being Foundation: Volunteers for Elderly Care in Japan

Japan Association of Charitable Organizations (JACO)

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Established by a prominent public prosecutor, Sawayaka Well-being Foundation has fostered the development of more than 2,000 community volunteer organizations to support Japan's elderly to lead independent lives.

In the leafy town of Aizumi in Tokushima Prefecture, some 300 miles southwest of the hustle and bustle of Tokyo, there is a place where its residents can come together. In the mid 1990s, recognizing that the community lacked a focal point, Nobuko Asano decided to do something about it. She had attended a lecture given by Tsutomu Hotta, a former deputy vice-minister, public prosecutor, and diplomat turned social welfare activist, who spoke about the loneliness and frustration of modern life in Japan.

The depletion of the extended family unit – traditionally a support network for both elderly and the young – has made way for smaller, nuclear households, with more elderly people living alone than ever before. "Many people feel lonely these days and disconnected from others, with their capabilities not being put to use," said Hotta. "They have food to eat and can go where they want to, but are left

The *ibasho* at Sawayaka Tokushima, partner organization to Sawayaka Well-being Foundation.

unsatisfied in their daily lives, harboring loneliness and feelings of loneliness and resignation." Seeing these trends play out in her own community, Asano opened her home to the public as *ibasho* – a community gathering place. By 2000, Asano had registered the space as a non-profit organization (NPO) under the name Sawayaka Tokushima.

Since then, it has evolved into a common space where elderly people can come to live out the end of their lives under the care of qualified staff; or simply drop by and spend their days in the company of others. High school and elementary students stream in to sit with the elderly visitors and residents, or to help them with daily tasks. They do so informally, or in exchange for brightly colored *fureai* – "caring relationship" – tickets which can be earned by volunteers as credit for time spent assisting seniors.

Inspired by Hotta's vision for a society underpinned by neighborly relations, Sawayaka Tokushima has since focused its efforts on caring for Aizumi's elderly, with 26 staff attending to 40 elderly day visitors, and 10 staff looking after 13 live-in residents receiving palliative care. Two hundred and seventy volunteers are registered under its *fureai* ticket program, and the house has become a bastion of the community – a return to the tradition of *ibasho*, where the young and the elderly alike can interact in a communal space.

Sawayaka Tokushima is just one corporate member of the Sawayaka Well-being Foundation (SWF), a national association of more than 2,000 groups across Japan that share a vision for promoting community-based volunteerism. SWF was founded in 1991 by Hotta who abruptly left a high-profile role as Deputy Vice-Minister at the Ministry of Justice to bridge the shortfall in the state's capacity to provide care services to senior citizens and address the growing disconnect between individuals and their communities.

MAN ON A MISSION

Born in Kyoto Prefecture in 1934 and a graduate of the Faculty of Law at Kyoto University, Hotta has been involved in issues of social justice from the early days of his career, serving as a public prosecutor before being appointed a member of Osaka District Public Prosecutor's Office special investigation team in 1966. The experience was formative, and prosecuting criminal cases fostered his awareness of social gaps and barriers in the country. After a stint at the Criminal Affairs Bureau of the Ministry of Justice, Hotta was assigned to the Japanese Embassy for the United States in Washington as First Secretary in 1972.

He recalled his time there as a turning point in his thinking regarding the community, volunteer activities, and potential applications to Japan. "We lived in Falls Church, Virginia, and rented a house, which was one of six built around a circle. Each house had a spacious garden but there was no fence or anything else demarcating a boundary line between the gardens, meaning that they were connected," he wrote subsequently in *Tokyo Shimbum* newspaper in 2008. "Children would come and go freely across the gardens to play and adults also socialized and deepened their relations, helping one another. It was similar to neighborly connections in a Japanese community from the good old days. But what differed was

A National Exchange Forum in 2014, hosted by Sawayaka Well-being Foundation.

that all neighborhood relations were based on the assumption of individual freedom." This model of community relations and Hotta's experience of it has informed SWF's vision to create a platform for independent citizens to share resources and to support each other at the community level.

Hotta returned to Japan to take the lead on a high-profile corporate bribery case as a member of the special investigation unit at the Tokyo District Public Prosecutor's Office, raising his own public profile in the process. In 1984, he was named chief of the Personnel Division in the Justice Minister's Secretariat and began using the platform to take on the thorny issue of judicial reform. He was appointed Deputy Vice-Minister of Justice in 1990, before retiring from public service – though by no means from public life – in November 1991.

A month later, Hotta hit the ground running and established the frontrunner to SWF, the Sawayaka Welfare Promotion Center, attracting media interest for his bold leap into the welfare sector. He began visiting a variety of organizations across Japan to begin the difficult work of changing mindsets about volunteering. "I found that audiences harbored some frustrations about the way that they were living. Many were willing to do something useful, to change the core of our society," he said. Some people Hotta spoke with went on to enlist in volunteer activities, establish NPOs, or join SWF as a partner. "They became part of the movement."

Current SWF president, Keiko Shimizu with former SWF president and current chairman, Tsutomo Hotta.

FUREAI TICKETS

His visits across the country were the beginning of Hotta's journey to fill a vacuum he saw in modern Japan that required "a new interactive society," with *fureai* tickets serving as a powerful mechanism to mobilize volunteers. Also known as time dollars, the tickets were processed by two computerized national clearing houses where credits could be transferred by volunteers to elderly relatives living in other areas, saved for use in retirement; or even spent straight away in exchange for services from another member. Volunteer services range from keeping an elderly person company and helping with household chores, to providing transportation and assisting with daily errands.

Although a similar concept had been piloted in North America and Europe, Hotta honed it to create a new movement of volunteers in the specific communal context of Japan. "He always tried to link community projects with the *fureai* ticket system," said Masaya Shimmei, a protégé of Hotta's at SWF in the early 1990s and now a research leader at the Human Care Research Team of the Tokyo Metropolitan Institute of Gerontology. "For the Japanese context, he needed to mobilize people who could connect the resources in the community."

Hotta's solution was the creation of a nationwide network of SWF instructors – there are 165 working across Japan today – who coordinate volunteer activities in their communities and pass requests for information and queries from local area NPOs to the SWF Tokyo office. "The instructors are the point of contact with the community," said Hotta. "We work with them to resolve local challenges and answer their questions." In addition, Hotta's government experience has been pivotal in SWF playing an intermediary role to link the grassroots volunteer movement with policy makers in central government.

NAVIGATING GOVERNMENT

Hotta's high profile from his previous career enabled him to build important relationships with the health and welfare ministries and the social welfare councils relevant to SWF's work. At the same time, a policy focus on volunteerism in the 1990s meant that the government was receptive to social participation as a means of addressing the increasingly urgent challenge of caring for Japan's elderly. With low fertility rates and a contracting working-age population, the government was facing the enormous task of caring for Japan's "silver" population and to finance their medical care and pensions. The *fureai* ticket movement was a natural complement for the government imperative to increase "care prevention" – to extend the period where seniors could live independently outside of care homes and hospitals. The spike in volunteers providing home-based care as a result of *fureai* tickets matched the new sentiment.

The year 1995 was a landmark for SWF. A boom for *fureai* tickets took place in the same year as the Great Hanshin Earthquake; Hotta and his team coordinated with the government to set up a network of volunteers to support post-disaster reconstruction. "The earthquake revealed the strength of the grassroots, and social solidarity developed quite quickly from the disaster," said Shimmei, who formerly worked with Hotta. "This was when volunteerism began to move to the mainstream, and NPOs began showing their presence."

SWF's project budget hit ¥150 million (around US$1.4 million at the time) in the year of the earthquake, exceeding the limit an individual can be liable for. This prompted Hotta to incorporate the Sawayaka Welfare Promotion Center as the Sawayaka Well-being Foundation (SWF), under the joint supervision of the welfare, education and labor ministries.

Fureai ticket activities grew rapidly until the government's implementation of a mandatory insurance-based, social care system that formalized entitlements to all citizens over age 65. Hotta, now chairman of SWF, was a key advocate of the *Long-Term Care Insurance Act (LTCI)* of 1997, which created more care options for senior citizens. Despite new opportunities for volunteering brought about by the *Act on the Promotion of Specified Nonprofit Activities* in 1998, which allowed for the expansion of NPOs, *fureai* ticket users declined from 2000 as more elderly people opted for the care services provisioned for under LCTI. "Some aspects of elderly care covered by *fureai* tickets were now covered by the new LCTI," said Hotta. "We

Sawayaka Well-being Foundation co-hosting a 2015 workshop in Fukushima Prefecture on regional-level support.

did not abandon it, as the insurance scheme did not cover all households, but the need for *fureai* tickets had noticeably diminished."

EVOLVING WITH TIME

Knowing that SWF needed to adapt to the changing landscape, in 2000 Hotta began steering SWF and its instructors towards reinvigorating the *ibasho* concept in communities and cultivating spaces where people could come and help each other; albeit in a more informal way than under the *fureai* ticket system.

As government policies toward care for the elderly have evolved and changed, SWF has had to do the same. The costs of the LCTI led the government to reduce coverage in 2013, giving renewed impetus to SWF. Cases where less intensive care could be administered at the community level were delegated to local governments. This placed the onus back on the shoulders of community groups and SWF members, who initially found it difficult to cope. "We had to expand our activities to cover this and it was too much for us," said Hotta. "It was difficult to meet the need."

There are plans for local governments to take on the burden by placing both salaried and volunteer coordinators for a community-based comprehensive care system in municipalities across Japan by 2017. Their role would be to coordinate and expand volunteer activities, and be responsible for administering care for those elderly not covered by the revised government insurance plan. In fact, these coordinators would play a very similar role to that of SWF's network of instructors – driving Hotta and SWF to once again adapt. "Our initial strategy was to promote volunteer activities through our instructors, but we have changed it," said Hotta. "We now work to educate local government on how to do this job, and are helping to train coordinators."

The new coordinators will eventually take over the work of SWF instructors in growing and coordinating the ecosystem of community organizations across Japan. For Hotta, this is all part of the process of social change, which is now at a critical tipping point in Japan with the cooption of volunteer networks under local government coordination. "Our movement developed very slowly, and we gathered members one by one," he recalled. "But within the government structure, the network could scale very rapidly."

For now, SWF continues in its work to cultivate a culture of volunteerism in Japan. One method is through running various events and forums – 55 were held in 2014 – to appeal to new audiences. SWF activities and projects target two key groups. On one hand, the bulk of its work focuses on raising awareness and encouraging volunteer activities at the community level, which includes fostering the creation of new volunteer organizations, organizing events to promote the *ibasho* and *fureai* ticket concepts. More recently, efforts have focused on promoting volunteer activities to support post-disaster reconstruction in the wake of the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake. This was SWF's largest individual project in 2014, with a budget of approximately ¥67 million (approximately US$635,000 at the time).

On the other hand, SWF targets companies and large organizations to get involved, for example, by encouraging professional sports teams to interact with young players and the elderly; holding study meetings to promote a culture of donations and implementing campaigns to encourage workers to volunteer. For Hotta, getting Japan's notoriously hard-working salary men and women to participate in volunteer activities has been one of the greatest challenges for SWF to date.

From SWF's early days, the necessity of engaging with government was evident. Policy advocacy has always been an important part of its work, and Hotta and his team continue to participate in various committees and panels to provide expertise on social welfare policy. As a regular speaker at government forums, Hotta remains a well-respected figure in Japan on community issues, for which SWF has emerged as an important intermediary between local community groups and the central government.

The concept of serving as a bridge between the grassroots and government has guided SWF over the past two decades, said Keiko Shimizu. Shimizu has taken over as president of SWF from Hotta, who continues to serve as chairman. "It is a goal of ours to transform systems and institutions hammered out by the state and administrative authorities into something that connects communities and develop them further," she said. In this sense, Hotta's experience in public office has been invaluable to SWF's ability to navigate the government bureaucracy and understand how to affect positive change.

LESSONS AND CHALLENGES

Hotta's experience and his public profile in Japan gave weight to his vision and to SWF's efforts. But a number of other factors were also at play that contributed to the foundation's success.

Unconventional Donor Base

From SWF's inception, Hotta foresaw the importance of a solid financial base, which he created by pooling funds raised from a wide range of sources – gathering some ¥100 million (around US$750,000 at the time) from 300 individuals and 70 companies and organizations upon its founding in 1995. This approach resonated too with SWF's philosophy of bringing together service-minded organizations and citizens as opposed to a more traditional donor model of relying on corporate donations. It continues to draw upon a variety of sources to finance its operations in 2014, including real estate leasing (17%); corporate and individual membership fees (8%); donations (7%) and subsidies (6%).

An important cornerstone of SWF's finances is the revenue derived from individual bequeaths. To date, 10 individuals have left property, securities, and cash to the organization in the equivalent amount of ¥3.3 billion (some US$27 million today). The bequests are managed under separate funds bearing the name of each deceased donor, with the use of funds tracked carefully against projects. Over time, the importance of bequests as a source of funding has been increasingly recognized by SWF, which has since formed a team tasked with handling bequests and raising public awareness of them as a means of charitable giving.

The care exercised in financial management of the funds and in memorializing individual donors have helped to increase this revenue stream. With multiple experts in inheritance management and law on the staff, SWF has even acted as the executor of last wills in some cases. Comprising board members

A 2015 consultative workshop for care prevention service providers and community care coordinators coordinators.

and academic experts, a Long-term Management Committee finalised a scheme to provide guidance on the use of bequests. In addition, SWF continues to follow up with the kin of donors, holding memorial ceremonies, for example, to honor the deceased and maintain the long-term trust of their relatives.

Though at a smaller scale, corporate funding also underpins SWF's activities. Importantly for SWF, the interests of donor organizations tend to be consistent with its own values and vision. The Japan Professional Football League (J-League), a public-interest association itself, donates around ¥10 million (around US$83,000 today) annually and partners with SWF to advance its own social goals "to promote regional exchanges, develop the spirit of volunteerism, and widen the circle of contact beyond generations through sports," said Saburo Kawabuchi, lead adviser to the Japan Football Association and SWF donor. Fitting with these goals, the league's teams participate at youth coaching clinics and at community events to practice football skills with the elderly.

Similarly, some SWF projects are funded by subsidies from several of Japan's largest public interest organization. Their goals regarding quality of life, volunteering, and helping the elderly live independent, healthy lives parallel with SWF's. The organizations include American Family Life Insurance, Tokio Marine & Nichido Fire Insurance, the Japanese Trade Union Confederation and Sumitomo Life Insurance Group. Sumitomo Life Insurance Group, a donor since SWF's beginning, continues to contribute some ¥10 million (around US$83,000 today) per year in grants. The company's engagement with SWF has deepened over the years, and its employees have participated in volunteer activities from 1992. For Hotta, this contribution of volunteer time is as important to the running of SWF as that of financial support.

Flat and Flexible

From the early days, Hotta envisioned SWF as a flat organization, in stark contrast with the hierarchical models traditionally employed at Japanese firms and entities. "A pyramid-shaped organization is conducive to top-down, employer-employee relationships, pay scales and job titles. But (in the world of nonprofit activities), we cannot necessarily allocate work according to pay and positions," Hotta said. "But we can produce maximum impact by undertaking projects that we are passionate about. This maximizes human potential."

The principles for project execution are outlined in detail in SWF's articles of incorporation. Decisions on staffing for SWF projects takes place in a meritocratic fashion, with teams organized under an independent leader. Guidance is provided not by senior managers, but through deliberation on projects at regular staff meetings (with the exception of matters of financial expenditure, which require senior management approval). In fact, under the foundation's articles of incorporation, "the entire staff" is required to undertake the "internal evaluation of each public benefit project."

For a peer feedback model to be effective, Hotta believes all staff must be familiar with each other, and that senior management in particular must be involved in day-to-day discussions and activities. All 33 staff work on a single floor, alongside Hotta and SWF president Shimizu. By being "embedded" with the team, SWF's senior leadership can help guide the ship and support project teams.

The principle is that staff can be responsive and that delays caused in waiting for approvals can be avoided, with trust being placed in the capacity of motivated project leaders to make decisions and exercise discretion. Staff members for any project are required to report directly to the board of directors and the board of councilors, and also to annual gathering of the some 165 SWF instructors from across Japan.

Eyes and Ears on the Ground

In its break from tradition, SWF's flat organization favors responsiveness over bureaucracy. Despite its lean infrastructure, it achieves scale through its regional network of instructors, and draws upon it for information to inform its policy work and

positions. Recognizing the value of its instructor network, SWF has distilled its expertise into a written methodology, which has since emerged as a respected curriculum for volunteer work in Japan. In partnership with SWF staff, the instructors work within communities to encourage the development of volunteer organizations and other non-profit groups. At the same time, they act as the "eyes and ears" for SWF, and visit project sites to get feedback from instructors and citizens to inform future planning and policy proposals.

Lessons in Governance

Corporate governance has been one of the most difficult challenges as SWF has grown. This is exemplified by a case of internal misconduct in 2012, when it was revealed that a SWF group leader had misappropriated ¥40 million yen (around US$500,000 at the time) from SWF's coffers in small increments over seven years. In response, Hotta implemented governance reforms, including a system of double-checking on bank withdrawals and the appointment of an independent director on the board. The case, however, exposed the vulnerability of SWF's flat structure and culture of trust.

Another major challenge is financial sustainability. Twice, the existence of SWF was at risk when it ran low on funds. In both cases, Hotta came to the rescue and invested personal funds. In response to the two near-misses, Hotta switched SWF to a model where a fundraising team's efforts are tied to specific projects, rather than an overall target allowing for SWF to adjust course based on the financial viability of projects.

OUTLOOK

SWF is familiar with having to adapt to Japan's changing social and policy environments, and it will continue to have to do so. Political pressure to manage public spending will always be part of the backdrop of the rising demand for elderly care. As government-paid coordinators gradually take on roles now filled by SWF instructors, the organization must once again change tack. For SWF president Shimizu, the instructor network will continue to gather information about communities and their needs. By building on its reputation as a conduit between government and communities, SWF will develop its capacity as an information hub that also analyzes policies and their implications.

Leadership is also an important issue on SWF's horizon. It is impossible to find someone who matches what Tsutomu Hotta brought to the table when SWF was formed in his government experience and credentials. Current president Shimizu has been a key member of SWF since 1992 and shares Hotta's passion and drive, but the challenge will be to retain relationships started and developed by Hotta, and to generate the public support he won to drive SWF's agenda.

In this respect, SWF's team comprises a wealth of experience to draw from – the average age in the office is 62 years – but is perhaps less familiar with digital communications and social media than younger counterparts. Its use of these to win new support and distribute information, particularly to youth volunteers, must be developed.

More than 20 years after its founding, SWF faces a national social welfare environment that is in flux. The government's changes to long-term insurance care in 2013 pushed open a new chapter for SWF. With the provision of community-based care devolved to the municipal level, there are also opportunities to experiment with solutions to meet the new demands arising. "We are now looking to combine the *fureai* ticket and *ibasho* concepts, where people can volunteer to earn *fureai* tickets or more informally – but they all have a focal point at *ibasho*," said Hotta.

With this hybrid model – already put in place by its Aizumi-based partner Tokushima Sawayaka – SWF is once again evolving to meet Japan's changing situation and needs. And perhaps therein lies one of the secrets to its own longevity.

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QUANTITATIVE INDICATORS

Financial

Planned budget or income versus actual expenditure for the fiscal year*	Income: ¥269.2 million (US$2.69 million) Expenditure: ¥265.3 million (US$2.65 million)
Income composition by source: individuals, corporations, events, trusts, other (please specify)	Asset management (1.5%); membership (9.9%); programme services (0.3%); grants (12.8%); donation (8.2%); donations for reconstruction assistance (52.3%); rents received (14.1%); others (0.8%)
Income composition: domestic versus international	Domestic: 100%

Personnel

Staff retention rate	100%
Turnover rate	0%
What is the board composition?	9 board members Occupation: full-time trustees of SWF (4), full-time trustees of other charities (5) Gender: men, 4; women, 5
How many meetings does the board hold per year?	Two meetings for board of trustees; three meetings for board of councillors
How many staff members are there?	33
How many staff members have attended some non-profit or management training course?	NA

Quantitative Indicators Continued

Organizational

Do you publish an annual report?	Yes
How many sites/locations do you currently operate in?	Japan, head office in Tokyo
Do you measure results?	No
What types of outreach?	Print, website
Do you regularly meet with government representatives? If yes, on a scale of 1-3 how close is the relationship with government? 1 = not close; 2 = somewhat close; 3 = very close	Yes Closeness of relationship = 3

* From April 2013 to March 2014. Average year exchange rate, US$ 1 = ¥100 (OANDA)