

## Santa Visits Children Affected by the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake



The idea to have Santa visit Tohoku children affected by the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake came when a group of students from Kanto Gakuin University visited a preschool in Kamaishi City in Iwate Prefecture. It was a summer picture book reading event to provide emotional support and relief to the children affected by the natural disaster. At the end of their visit, the children said, "When you come back, bring Santa Claus!"

Planned and implemented by the Kanto Gakuin University students in December 2011, the Santa

Project was born. This was in collaboration with organizations in Finland, including the traditional choir Belcanto and Santa Claus who is officially approved by Finland's Santa Claus Village.

Since then every year, Santa Claus from Finland visits children in various areas destroyed by the earthquake and tsunami passing out gifts to bring them holiday cheer.

The Santa Project receives funding from a wide range of Japanese companies, including Otsuka Pharmaceutical. Volunteer students as well as Otsuka Pharmaceutical employees helped package SOYJOY bars and Calorie Mate in gift bags for Santa to give the children.



Santa Claus paying respect at the Hokkaido Nansei-oki earthquake memorial

The Santa Project provides emotional support and relief by promoting exchange events between survivors of the disaster, including children, and people from outside the area, to ensure that the event does not fade from memory.

Santa Project volunteers travel with disaster survivors to Okinawa and Niigata, which itself has suffered from earthquake disasters in the past, Hokkaido, and other locations in Japan to promote cultural exchange between the people in these areas and the disaster survivors.

Volunteers in the Santa Project hope that it can bring people together so that they can bring each other hope and joy, in the same way that the idea of Santa Claus brings hope and joy to children around the world.