



(l-r) Barbara Rosasco (Kasumisou Foundation), Kim Forsythe-Ferris (Tyler Foundation), Yumiko Tategami and Marjorie Chiba (Hands On Tokyo), and Vickie Paradise Green (Run for the Cure)

Ken Katsurayama

Champions of Compassion

Five Women's Group members talk about the challenges and rewards of setting up and running charities in Japan.

by Ulrica Marshall

The late Mother Teresa once said, "Yesterday is gone. Tomorrow has not yet come. We have only today. Let us begin." It is this spirit that personifies the women behind the five charities that benefited from the Women's Group's 60th Anniversary Gala in April. Often with little more than a deep-rooted desire to help others and sometimes still reeling from personal tragedy, each of them had to first navigate Japan's baffling bureaucratic maze to register the organization. □

Deva Hirsch

HANDS ON TOKYO

Modeled on the HandsOn Network, an organization that promotes volunteering in the United States, Hands On Tokyo was established by American Deva Hirsch in December 2006 to give people an opportunity to contribute to Japanese society. "We felt so fortunate to be here," she explains. "I discovered that [volunteering] was not only a difficulty for our family, but also for others, both foreign and Japanese."

More than two years on and Hands On Tokyo connects hundreds of volunteers each week to a host of activities, from restoring children's playgrounds to playing basketball with mentally disabled young people.

The organization was recently granted nonprofit status, but Hirsch says that the process was far from easy. "Currently, the questions that [the government] asks and the process that is followed do not follow best practice and is not set up to encourage sustainable organizations."

Although the work to keep Hands On Tokyo running is demanding, Hirsch says there are often moments when her reasons for starting the organization are reaffirmed, such as the 80-year-old woman in a nursing home who was "so happy" after receiving her first-ever manicure.

www.handsontokyo.org