

T O K Y O

# families

ALL NEW!

April 2008

F R E E

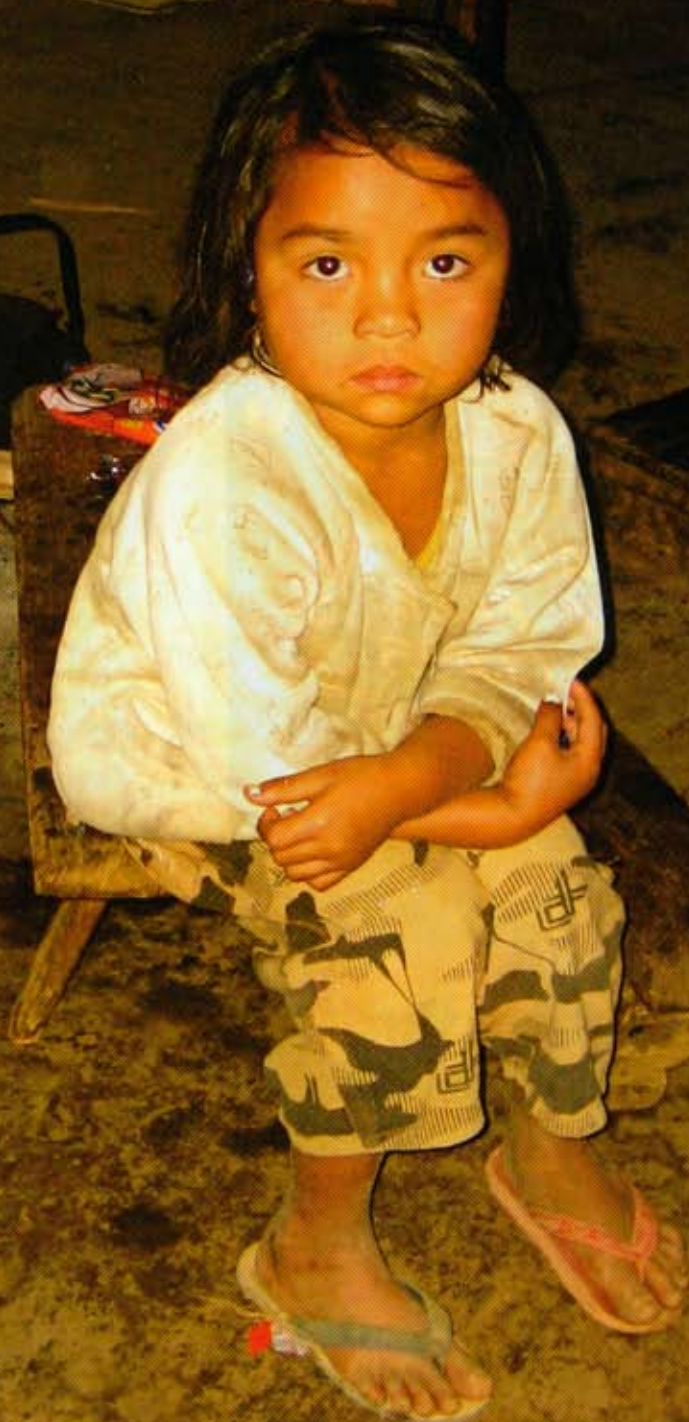
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# LOUISE GEORGE KITTAKA Community matchmaker

**Hands On Tokyo embodies the spirit of volunteering, linking agencies with people who are keen to make a difference**

**W**hen American mom of two Deva Hirsch moved to Tokyo two and a half years ago, her first priority was helping her family adapt to the challenges of their new environment. "Honestly, starting a nonprofit organization was the last thing on my agenda!" she laughs. However, with a background in non-profit management, Deva soon realized there were chances to put her skills and experience to good use in Tokyo.

In 1989 Deva co-founded Hands On Atlanta, one of a network of more than 90 communities around the world that operates under the umbrella of the Hands On Network. The premise is simple—match up people interested in volunteering their time with groups and organizations who want the assistance.

While Japanese society is not unfamiliar with the idea of volunteering, those with the will and the means to help often don't know where to turn. It is even harder for foreign residents to volunteer their services here, due to the language and cultural barriers they might face. "After searching for opportunities, I found both my lack of Japanese skills and the lack of meaningful volunteer offerings to be discouraging," Deva recalls. "I began hearing similar stories from foreign and Japanese friends." In some cases, well meaning citizens have showed up at agencies, only to be handed a broom and told, "We just need you to clean."

Deva gathered a group of interested people to discuss the idea of starting something in late 2006 and Hands On Tokyo was born the following January. "Hands On Tokyo is Tokyo's only bilingual clearinghouse. We aim to connect Japanese and foreign nationals with meaningful service opportunities," Deva explains. "Each volunteer receives orientations, both to Hands On Tokyo itself and to the agency for which they'll volunteer."

Hands On Tokyo has grown to 250 volunteers who gave more than 1000 hours of community service in 2007. "Our ongoing projects include partnerships with Second Harvest Food Party, Sakuragawa Senior Home and the Special Olympics. Anyone is welcome!" says Deva. "Singles, couples, families, school groups and workmates have all volunteered with Hands On Tokyo."

With a view to increasing capacity to better serve the Tokyo community, the group is looking to raise funds for future growth. On the evening of April 18, they will host an event called A Taste for Volunteering, at the City Club of Tokyo. Attendees will be able to try food from several different cuisines and bid on exciting auction items, ranging from overseas vacations to luxury makeovers. Tickets are ¥20,000 a person, which covers all food, wine and a donation to Hands On Tokyo.

*To register for A Taste of Volunteering contact: [info@handsontokyo.org](mailto:info@handsontokyo.org). The deadline is April 4. Volunteering opportunities: [www.handsontokyo.org](http://www.handsontokyo.org)*