

LIFELINES

From baby massage to fostering pets, many options for volunteers

By ASHLEY THOMPSON

Reader M.S. is looking for volunteer opportunities in Tokyo that don't require fluent Japanese ability, as many — if not most — do. In particular, she'd like to work with animals.

Though volunteering opportunities in Japan were covered extensively after the March 11, 2011, disasters, there are a few options for animal lovers in Japan.

Animal Refuge Kansai (ARK) has branches in Tokyo and Osaka, although only their Osaka branch has a shelter. Opportunities in Tokyo include being a foster family for pets until they find permanent homes and sporadic, event-specific jobs.

For those who want to get involved at the Osaka branch, ARK said: "Volunteers from any country who can understand instructions in English (or Japanese) are very welcome there any time of the year. We are always looking for people to help walk dogs, brush cats and generally give our animals some of the personal attention we simply cannot provide without volunteer help. We are happy to provide accommodation for people who volunteer there for a few days or more, although we need to know when they are coming."

For more details, visit their website, www.arkbark.net.

Sala Network, based in Tokyo, is another animal-focused organization that accepts volunteers for a variety of roles, including taking care of the dogs and cats and other related activities. See www.salanetwork.or.jp/e_index.html.

Japan Cat Network (japanecatnet.com) is looking for volunteers not only at their two shelters in Kansai and Fukushima Prefecture, but in remote locations as well. They also have dogs and cats that need fostering.

For those of you looking to get involved in other ways, but who are maybe not so confident about your Japanese ability, the following organizations might be worth looking into.

Hands On Tokyo serves as a "bilingual volunteer portal" that connects volunteers with different types of activities, ranging from visits to children's homes and senior centers to teaching English and sports activities with young people. You can find their calendar and more details at www.handsontokyo.org.

Kizuna Baby trains volunteers and facilitates regular visits to infants' homes to do baby massage and give the babies one-on-one attention. Volunteers must pay ¥8,000 for the training, and it's offered in English.

Though Kizuna Baby hopes to continue expanding around Japan, they currently have programs in Tokyo, Yokohama, Kobe, Beppu (Oita Prefecture) and Morioka (in Iwate). To get involved or request a program in your area, visit www.kizunababy.jp/home_English.html.

Second Harvest Japan (headquartered in Tokyo) has several opportunities available. They also accept food, equipment and monetary donations for the homeless. You can find their website at www.2hj.org.

Tokyo English Life Line (www.telljp.com) is also Tokyo-based, and needs volunteers in areas including TELL Life Line counselor training, graphic design, event help and IT support.

There are many different ways to get involved in the **Tohoku recovery efforts**, but good places to start looking include It's Not Just Mud (itsnotjustmud.com/), Habitat for Humanity (www.habitatjp.org/enblog/2012/05/20120523tvr.html), Peace Boat (peaceboat.jp/relief/volunteer/) and Be One (www.b-1.jp/tohoku/en/)

The Facebook group Foreign Volunteers Japan also centers primarily around Tohoku relief, but opportunities elsewhere are mentioned on the discussion wall, at www.facebook.com/groups/Foreignvolunteersjapan/.

Oxfam, an international organization fighting poverty and injustice, has some opportunities at its Tokyo branch. They also hold a popular annual fundraising event that involves hiking 100 km, among many others. Check out oxfam.jp/en/whatyoucan/.

Human rights organization **Amnesty International** (www.amnesty.or.jp/en/get-involved/) is always looking for volunteers.

Finally, you might want to check if there are ways to **get involved in your city** or town. Often Japanese is necessary, but not in all cases. For example, the Tokyo Voluntary Action Center lists some helpful resources and potential organizations on their site, www.tvac.or.jp/page/english_getinvolved.html. The Nagoya International Center also has several opportunities (www.nic-nagoya.or.jp/en/e/about-us/volunteer-system) for residents in the Chubu area.

You don't necessarily have to live in a major city, though. Maybe your local library would like to have someone read picture books to children in English or another language once a week or month. Or you could help put together and distribute local English (or other language) publications for non-Japanese speakers.

Many expats have started nonprofit organizations here in Japan, so if you still can't find what you're looking for, why not start something yourself? You never know what kind of a difference you could make.

If you know of any organizations to add to this list, please drop us a line.

Seeking word from old friends

Dale is trying to locate his friends in Japan, whom he hasn't heard from since the March 11 disasters.

"I have written and while the letter did not come back to me, I have heard nothing. I would appreciate any information anyone has on my friends. Their names are Ichihiro and Tazuko Yamaguchi. In 2011 they were living in Kita Ward, Tokyo."

If you can help Dale, please email him at daleannmorgan@cox.net.

Ashley Thompson writes unique how-tos about living in Japan at www.survivingnJapan.com. Send all your questions to lifelines@japantimes.co.jp

The Japan Times: Tuesday, July 24, 2012

(C) All rights reserved