As a member of the community

Have you ever heard the words ‘self-help’, ‘mutual aid’ or ‘public assistance’? These are words often used when thinking about preparing for disasters.

What do these words mean? Well, ‘self-help’ is protecting and keeping yourself safe. ‘Mutual aid’ is when the people and community around ourselves work together to help each other. ‘Public assistance’ on the other hand; is when people are assisted and helped by the city and government, such as through the fire department, police, and the Self-Defense Force. I did not understand what these words meant before I started learning about disaster prevention at school.

When I was little, the city where I lived was threatened by the Great East Japan Earthquake. The tsunami that followed caused extremely serious damage. However, I was still really young then and have almost no memories of that time. But in the following years, all over Japan there have been not only earthquakes but other numerous natural disasters such as guerrilla rainstorms and landslides. Even in Ogawara, the town where I now live, has been severely damaged by various natural disasters.

For the last two years I have been focusing on “disaster prevention learning” at my school. Together with my schoolmates, we have been conducting various activities that are possible for junior high school students, such as checking evacuation sites and creating disaster prevention maps. From these activities I have come to realize the importance of connecting with local people, and also understanding where the local danger points are. At the same time, it made me realize how little and narrow the information I know about my area is.

I want to know more about my area and I want to be of more help to the community. Driven by this urge, I decided to first walk around the city where I live. I discovered there are many places with problems and dangers that I previously did not know about. There are broken block walls, narrow roads with poor visibility, and there are places that are considered dangerous if Shiroishi River overflows. As I once again noticed my lack of knowledge about disaster prevention for my city, I felt I wanted to know more about this area. I wanted to be more involved in activities for regional disaster prevention. This motivated me to join “Project MAS”.

Project MAS is a volunteer organization that is run by students who wish to acquire more specialized knowledge about disaster prevention, as well as learn about how to open and operate a school to become a shelter in the case of a disaster. Under the assumption that the school will be able to be opened in the case of a disaster, we have done drills such as setting up dozens of tents in the gymnasium. From now on we also plan to invite townspeople to participate in the training, too. By repeating these training drills, I would like to make further efforts to improve and fix any issues that are discovered. The things I have learned from participating in Project MAS have been both eye-opening and rewarding for me. However, I feel my "defense" activities are only just beginning.

I wish to continue to acquire and hone various knowledge through the activities of Project MAS. Through information exchanges about dangerous areas and evacuation shelter training I also wish to convey everything I have learned to as many people as possible, including friends, family, and local people. That is my mission as a member of this community. I will continue to do my best for the future of Ogawara, with the aim of having a society where we can provide "mutual aid".