

JAPAN

The 26th Asia-Pacific International Seminar on Special Education Country Report: Japan

Shigeki Fujii

**Department for Educational Support Research
National Institute of Special Education**

1.

In Japan, efforts have been made to identify and support people with disabilities at each stage of life. During infancy, the healthcare sector works primarily to identify disabilities during (1) medical examinations and to support development that is tied to later habilitation. Where children with disabilities and normal children spend daytime as a group, the welfare sector engages in inclusion in (2) day care centers, while the education sector does so in (3) pre-schools. While the activities of (1), (2), and (3) have been reinforced in each of these sectors, linkage from (1) to (2) and from (1) to (3) ran into the problem of vertically-divided government bureaucracy, and thus such linkage was less than satisfactory. Each of these links was primarily promoted by caregivers.

Moreover, when a person with a disability reached the (4) employment stage, it was difficult for this person to gain employment at a company because their caregivers could not obtain relevant information easily. Thus, both people with disabilities and their caregivers had serious concerns about the future.

2,3,4

Konan City is located in southeast Shiga Prefecture, which is the home of Lake Biwa, Japan's largest lake. It is positioned within 100 kilometers of both Osaka and Nagoya, and has a population of 56,000 people. The city is surrounded by mountains, and has views of the Aboshiyama Mountains to the south and Iwaneyama Mountains to the north. The Yasu River flows through the center of the region, and the open flatlands around the river offer a rich natural environment of water and greenery. Utsukushimatsu pines, a national natural monument whose beautiful shapes are known nationwide, are also found there. The city is the location of Konan Industrial Park, which has attracted some 300 companies as well as people from around the country, and is home to many laborers from Brazil and Peru.

5.

In Konan City and other municipalities, healthcare administration, welfare administration, and education administration were handled individually by separate departments. There were few instances of collaboration among these departments, and in cases where work involved several

departments, the persons in charge had to coordinate this work by moving around among the relevant departments.

It was because of this difficulty in collaboration that groups of children with disabilities (groups made up of people with intellectual disabilities, physical disabilities, and psychiatric disorders as well as groups of parents having children with speech disorders, autism, and learning disorders) in Konan City took the lead in asking the city government to establish a unified system that covered the entire lifetime of people with disabilities.

6.

To resolve this situation, work began toward building a system shaped around specialization and continuity of support for “individual educational programs” (or IEP) and “individual transition plans” (or ITP)—in collaboration among the healthcare, welfare, education, and employment sectors—in order to provide unified support for people with needs.

7.

Thus, in April of 2002, Konan City launched the Konan City Development Support System as a unified approach to support that covers the entire lifetime of people with disabilities.

This system has two goals. The first is to enhance peace of mind and support at “the present time” and to provide support that is matched to individual needs. And the second is to provide support that keeps an eye to the future.

8.

The first goal involves establishment of an environment that gives caregivers and individuals with special needs peace of mind “at the present time,” and building of systems that can handle highly specialized support. Toward this end, work proceeded toward preparing IEPs—which are written plans into which ascertainment of actual conditions and support content are incorporated in order to meet individual needs—for (1) habilitation, (2) day care centers, and (3) pre-schools, elementary schools, and junior schools. Other efforts included dispatch of itinerant consultants to ensure that specialized support can be handled at all locations, and establishment of a system in which schools and pre-schools participate on an organization-wide level. Moreover, (6) “Development Support Centers” in which children with disabilities can receive instruction from specialists were established within elementary schools.

The second goal involves establishment of a (5) “Development Support Office” that oversees the healthcare, welfare, education, and employment sectors and coordinates support that is matched to each life stage. This is in order to establish a unified support framework that covers the entire lifetime.

The Development Support Office is made up of city employees working in the education, healthcare, welfare and employment sectors.

9.

The “Development Support Office” of (5) is set up to have a director who has experience as a teacher, and a health nurse who has experience in mother-and-child healthcare, mental health, and other fields. Both of these people serve as full-time office staff members. Also on staff are people from (7) five divisions concerned with development support. They are: A welfare worker of person with disabilities from the Social Welfare Division who is qualified in psychiatric disorders; a health nurse in charge of mother-and-child health from the Healthcare Policy Division; a School Education Division supervisor from the Board of Education; a childcare supervisor from the Parental Care Support Division; and a labor administration supervisor from the Commerce, Industry, and Tourism Division. These supervisors meet on a regular basis to discuss the roles to be undertaken by each division with regard to support for people with disabilities as well as collaboration among these divisions.

10.

The Konan City Development Support System is a framework that provides 1) services through linkage among related institutions of education, welfare, healthcare, and employment, and 2) IEP- and ITP-based services that cover all areas of an individual child’s case, from pre-enrollment to his or her school years and, further, his or her employment.

11.

This schematizes the Konan City Development Support System to show support projects, support institutions, and concerned institutions. The complete system for providing unified support from early childhood to employment is shown here.

12.

Times when concerned institutions can meet to discuss issues are always limited. It is because of this that Konan City considered venues for discussion that use the Internet. This resulted in development of the “Konan City Development Support IT Network.” Through this network, which can only be used by a limited number of institutions and designated persons, education consultation and information are shared. The institutions on the left-hand side are government institutions and specialized institutions, while those on the right-hand side are educational institutions that children attend. Through the network, people whose duties bring them into contact with children utilize IT to build a collaborative system that supports people with disabilities.

13.

Here, I would like to give a specific example of support for a child with a disability. In this

example, an elementary school boy who is being treated for high-functioning autism lives together with his mother. His mother, too, visits a hospital because of a psychiatric disorder. She is also receiving welfare benefits to support their daily living. Support for the autistic boy comes in the form of a language classroom and treatment from a pediatrician; support for the mother's condition is supplied by a psychiatrist and a public health nurse from the city; economic support comes in the form of livelihood protection provided by a caseworker from the city's Social Welfare Division; and daily life support is provided by a designated welfare supporter in community. In this way, specific roles are determined. These workers provide support to the family by meeting once a month in a "case meeting." This approach is allowing the child and his mother to live their lives with peace of mind.

14.

As I explained when giving examples of consultation, a system for consultation support has been established in Konan City. If a need for consultation with regard to a day care center or pre-school, an elementary or junior high school, or an in-home child is communicated to relevant organizations. Then Consultation Support Team is set up as needs require. This team holds regular meetings on individual service coordination and provides relevant support.

15.

In this way, fine-tuned support that addresses the needs of the individual can be provided once a disability is discovered. This support is based on an IEP that covers healthcare, habilitation, day care center and pre-school, elementary school, junior high school, high school, special schools, and employment as well as all life stages. Such support requires collaboration and cooperation between specialists and the local government.