

Report on the Project to Record Contributions Made by Junior High and High School Students after the Earthquake



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Save the Children
JAPAN

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Preface

Since the earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011, Save the Children Japan (SC Japan) has been providing children's rights-based recovery assistance in Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures under a five-year strategy.

Save the Children, an international non-governmental organization, has a vision of a world in which every child attains the right to survival, protection, development and participation. Our mission in the recovery effort is to help disaster-affected children and parents resume their ordinary lives and to create with children a society in which they can voice their opinions and participate in the community rebuilding process.

SC Japan launched the Kodomo Hagukumi Fund in cooperation with the Sanaburi Foundation as a form of recovery assistance. Through grants, the Kodomo Hagukumi Fund supports community members in finding solutions to recovery-related issues concerning children on their own and encourages voluntary civic activities to promote an environment in which children can grow up healthy. The fund has already supported more than 70 projects, including the creation of this booklet.

Are children merely to be protected in the recovery from the unprecedented disaster? In the wake of the disaster, it seems that children were most often referred to that way. There is no doubt that there are a number of rights issues that must be considered for the protection of children after a disaster. But if children speak up and participate in society while adults and society support them by listening to them and reflecting upon their opinions, children will be empowered to become active agents in the recovery process.

The accounts in this report of the experiences of students just after the disaster clearly demonstrate that children are not just the leaders of tomorrow but of today as well.

The "Project to Record Contributions Made by Junior High and High School Students after the Earthquake" was implemented to ensure that the roles children played in their communities after the disaster would not be forgotten by turning memories (*kioku*) into written records (*kiroku*). We hope that this report will raise awareness of the views of children among governments, educators, companies, communities and parents and serve as a reference for the recovery of Japan, a country often struck by natural disasters. We also hope this report will help diverse stakeholders build good communities in cooperation with children, who are valuable members of the community.

The message we'd like to deliver through this report is: Children are the valuable partners of adults in society.

Takumi Koide

Director of the Great East Japan Earthquake Recovery Program
Save the Children Japan

Project Overview: From Memory to Written Record

1. Purpose of the project

- a) It was reported that along with adults, students did their best to overcome difficulties after the disaster in various situations: from leading people to higher ground after the quake to enduring tough living situations in evacuation centers. The examples are manifold: high school students assisting senior citizens to evacuate from welfare facilities, high school students serving meals and water along with teachers after their school was turned into an evacuation center, junior high school students delivering water supplied by water trucks to elderly people, junior high and high school students playing with younger children in evacuation centers.
- b) In order to share their feelings, wishes and acts with many, submissions were solicited through a number of channels. Their stories will be distributed widely in the form of a booklet.
- c) At the same time, feedback was gathered from students who stayed in evacuation centers as to what would be good to have in the centers. This feedback will be utilized as a reference for establishing emergency stockpiles in the future. For example, including drawing paper and crayons in the stockpile might reduce children's stress during an emergency. (See attachment.)
- d) Students spend most of the daytime in their local communities and can play a major role in the event of a wide-scale disaster, and also in communities' disaster mitigation and prevention, such as by ensuring smooth evacuations. Therefore, how to involve students is a significant factor in supporting local communities. We hope this report will serve as a reference for protecting children as well as for considering students' roles and responsibilities in wide-scale disasters without putting too much burden on them.
(This project called for voluntary submission of students' stories. Whether to submit a story or not was up to each individual. Stories were solicited at schools via posters only.)

2. Target

- a) Junior high and high school students (including some students who were in the upper grades of elementary school at the time of the disaster)
 - i. Students living in the six prefectures of the Tohoku area: Aomori, Iwate, Miyagi, Akita, Yamagata and Fukushima
 - ii. Students outside the six prefectures who conducted activities in Tohoku after the disaster
- b) Adults
Adults who were helped by students or saw what they did

3. Announcement of the project

- a) About 3,000 posters and 1,000 handouts were prepared, and people were asked to display them. (See chart below.)
- b) Press releases were sent to about 100 newspapers distributed in the Tohoku area (national and regional) as well as television and radio stations.
- c) Other forms of announcement on websites, etc.

4. Acceptance of Submissions

- a) Forms were distributed via mail, fax, e-mail and made available on the Internet (PC and cell phone versions)

Posters and forms were sent to:

Junior high schools (Iwate, Miyagi, Fukushima)	791
High schools (Aomori, Iwate, Akita, Miyagi, Fukushima)	445
Special schools (Iwate, Miyagi, Fukushima)	37
Junior colleges (Iwate, Miyagi, Fukushima, Yamagata)	6
Universities (Iwate, Miyagi, Fukushima, Yamagata)	29
NPOs, etc. (Iwate, Miyagi, Fukushima)	208
Recovery area shopping districts (Iwate, Miyagi, Fukushima)	6
Children's centers, clubs (Iwate, Miyagi, Fukushima)	297
Libraries (Iwate, Miyagi, Fukushima)	126
Public facilities, etc. (Iwate, Miyagi, Fukushima)	13
Total	1,958



Posters

Comments Submitted

Total submissions: 205

Students	E-mail	147
	Internet	9
	Total	156
Adults	Mail	43
	Internet, E-mail	6
	Total	49

By Prefecture

Prefecture	Students	Adults	Total
Iwate	22	12	34
Miyagi	54	32	86
Fukushima	19	5 (incl. 7 blank forms)	24
Akita	2		2
Yamagata	1		1
Tokyo	1		1
Hyogo	57		57
Total	156	49	205

What would have been good to have in the evacuation centers?

Item	No. of Replies
Items to protect against cold (blankets, stoves, etc.)	30
Food (hot food, water, etc.)	19
Electronics (lights, radios, etc.)	19
Hygiene products (moistened wipes, rags, etc.)	13
Toys (playing cards, balls, etc.)	5
Shoes and clothes	3
Stationery (paper, pens, etc.)	2
Manpower to provide support	2
Other (partitions, shovels, place to study, etc.)	22

What would have been helpful for you to have?

Classification	No. of Replies
Manpower	28
Information	3
Food	3
Other	12

5. Interviews

- a) Seven groups of people who submitted comments were interviewed from January to March 2013:
- i. Yamada, Iwate Prefecture: Y and S (third-year high school students), N (father), T (mother)
 - ii. Osaki, Miyagi Prefecture (Miyagi Prefectural Tajiri Sakura High School): S, Y, T, N, A (third-year high school students), C (teacher)
 - iii. Higashi Matsushima, Miyagi Prefecture: N (third-year high school student)
 - iv. Sendai, Miyagi Prefecture: N (second-year junior high school student), K (third-year junior high school student)
 - v. Aizu Wakamatsu, Fukushima Prefecture: N, M, Y, H (first-year students at a high school of nursing)
 - vi. Yamagata City, Yamagata Prefecture: S (college freshman)
 - vii. Kobe, Hyogo Prefecture: H, R, M, F (first-year students at Hyogo Prefectural Maiko High School); A, N, E, T (second-year students at Maiko High School); K, N, S, Y, O (third-year students at Maiko High School), W (teacher)

6. Implementation

- a) In implementing the project, Yoshie Abe, an assistant professor in the Faculty of Letters, Arts and Sciences at Waseda University and a specialist in child participation, offered advice from the planning stage. She also sat in on the interviews and wrote the summary. Yuta Nagumo, a doctoral candidate in the Graduate School of Letters, Arts and Science at Waseda University, conducted and compiled the interviews.
- b) Yuji Suzuki, Kyoko Shiga, and Harumi Nemoto from the Sanaburi Foundation took part in this project.

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Project Overview

By Yoshie Abe

Assistant Professor, Faculty of Letters, Arts and Sciences, Waseda University

Introduction

From the perspective of child advocacy, I would first like to reflect on why we decided to record the roles played by junior high and high school students (hereinafter “students”) after the earthquake, then introduce stories submitted by students and consider what we can learn from them.

1. Roles played by children after the earthquake

In the bleak aftermath of the earthquake, children were our hope. Many people were comforted and encouraged by the smiling faces of children. Adults also saw teenagers think and act on their own initiative and support people staying in evacuation centers and temporary housing. We saw high school students who had lost their parents help serving meals, junior high school students who were earthquake victims themselves carry the elderly to safety on their backs, and small children carry heavy water containers and supplies. Parents commented on how the students allowed them to take the first step forward in rebuilding their lives by playing with the younger children when the nursery schools and kindergartens had not yet reopened. Many students from areas that had escaped major damage also participated in volunteer activities such as sorting supplies, cleaning up mud, and providing learning assistance.

Now that nearly two years have passed since the disaster, however, we have almost forgotten the roles these children played. To prevent this from happening, the “Project to Record Contributions Made by Junior High and High School Students after the Earthquake” was launched. It was sponsored by Save the Children Japan and implemented by the Sanaburi Foundation. The goal of the project is to keep a record (*kiroku*) of the many contributions made by students after the earthquake, rather than leaving them as memories (*kioku*) that may be forgotten, and to report and share this information throughout the wider society.

The project put out a call, aimed primarily at the six Tohoku prefectures, for stories about things students did for others and actions adults saw them take after the earthquake, and a total of 205 submissions — 156 from students and 49 from adults — were received between October 11, 2012 and January 7, 2013.

2. Perceptions that rob teenagers of their role in society

What kinds of images do we associate with teenagers? When they appear in newspapers, television and other media, students are associated with behavioral problems, such as bullying, school violence

and juvenile crime. We see reports of students displaying bad manners, such as applying make-up in trains, loitering in public places, riding bicycles against traffic, and hogging the sidewalk. For a brief period following the disaster, however, there was a big shift in this coverage. The news media started putting out almost daily reports on students who were assisting with the operation of evacuation centers and helping adults. Many adults were inspired when they saw and heard these reports.

Did students change after the disaster? There were definitely major changes in their lives and surroundings. But it seems that the greatest change was in the adults who impart and receive information. Those of us who are involved in child advocacy know that students are capable of thinking and acting on their own regardless of whether or not they live in a disaster area. But what about the majority of adults?

At the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on Children held in New York in 2002, 400 delegates under the age of 18 delivered a message called “A World Fit for Us.” The delegates, including street children, victims of child labor and abuse, and HIV/AIDS orphans, asserted that “the children of the world are misunderstood.” The meaning of this statement can be summed up in the following sentence: “We are not the sources of problems; we are the resources that are needed to solve them.” Many adults tend to view students as the sources of problems. It would be unfortunate if this perception were to rob young people of the opportunity to fulfill their roles in society.

Herein lies another important reason for recording the contributions made by students after the earthquake. Teenagers are not the sources of problems but are in fact capable of performing a major role in disaster recovery. Now that the process of recovery from the Great East Japan Earthquake is moving forward, it’s time to make and share a record of their contributions.

3. Children’s right to be heard in emergencies

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted unanimously by the U.N. General Assembly in 1989, is a commitment made by countries to “act in the best interests of the child.” Ratified by the Japanese government in 1994, the Convention boasts a total of 193 contracting states, making it the most-ratified human rights treaty in the world and the yardstick that is applied when measures affecting children are implemented. The Convention treats children under the age of 18 not merely as objects of protection but also as people capable of exercising their rights. But how does this apply to disaster reconstruction?

In General Comment No. 12, “The right of the child to be heard” (CRC/C/GC/12), adopted in 2009, Section 10 on emergency situations notes that the right of the child to be heard “does not cease” in emergency situations and that “there is a growing body of evidence of the significant contribution that children are able to make in...reconstruction processes following emergencies.” The “Project to Record” is part of that body of evidence. We decided to publish the unedited accounts of students and the comments of adults who saw what they did, in order to record how children contributed during the crisis posed by the disaster. We recommend you read through them.

We also interviewed seven people who agreed to share more details of their stories.

4. Stories we want to share with students: excerpts from interviews

a. Turning thoughts toward the 205 comments and their context

Before taking a look at the interviews, let us consider the statement, “I couldn’t do anything” in the submitted comments. Those of you who wrote that may have been affected by the disaster yourself and couldn’t take on other roles. Maybe you felt angry or resentful about this project. Maybe you blamed yourself for not being able to do anything when you saw others your age doing volunteer work. Maybe you have done something but felt it was not worth mentioning.

“I couldn’t do anything.” It was impossible to ignore those words. No matter how hard I tried, it was impossible to understand exactly what kind of situation you were in. Yet, I couldn’t help thinking about those of you who wrote, “I couldn’t do anything.” Hearing “the roles played by students,” perhaps you mistakenly thought that students who accomplished something amid the difficult conditions after the disaster were great while those who did nothing were useless. The purpose of this project was not to gather touching tales of students but to provide an unvarnished record of the roles played by students after the disaster. I want to thank those of you who sent in comments, including the statement, “I couldn’t do anything.”

This statement indicates that behind the 205 stories are many more comments by students that were not or could not be submitted, and we must also turn our thoughts to them. That said, we would like to fully consider how the 205 submissions should be recorded, shared and utilized.

b. Our efforts can motivate others

The first thing students said in the interviews was always: “Is it okay to be interviewed for such a small thing?” They said they had only done what they were supposed to do and that what they did was nothing special. But they must have decided to take part in the interviews in the hope that their stories would provide opportunities for others. For instance, “S” (then a second-year high school student) started and ran an evacuation center at a high school in Kesenuma immediately after the disaster. When explaining why he took the initiative he said, “Since the third-year students had already graduated, there was no choice but to take action ourselves.” “K” (then a first-year junior high school student) from Sendai felt that because she was staying in the same gym she always used, she wanted to do things herself. She took responsibility for serving meals and carrying water from the swimming pool to the restroom. Reading these interviews gives us an idea of what students can do after a disaster.

“T” (then a first-year student at Tajiri Sakura High School) hopes that students who have never done any volunteering will get involved after reading this report. “K” (a third-year student at Maiko High School) said, “I want high school students of our age who don’t know how to take action to learn what they can do by reading our stories and then take action.”

c. Making use of this knowledge in the next disaster

What did students who were born and raised in the areas affected by the Great Hanshin Earthquake do? Maiko High School, a prefectural high school in Hyogo, has the only Environment

and Disaster Mitigation Course in Japan. “N” said she was able to imagine another natural disaster thanks to learning about disaster prevention in the course and that without learning about that subject, people tend to think there won’t be another disaster. So She would like people her age as well as the next generation to read the record in order to prepare for the next disaster. “E” said it is important to listen to students who have experienced the earthquake and tsunami. “When a high school student from Ishinomaki told me there were many things she wanted to say, I realized it was important to listen and to include the many things she said in my own disaster mitigation,” She said.

“S”, who was affected by the earthquake and tsunami in Kesenuma, particularly wants students to read the records to get a feel for what people have gone through. Teenagers are at a most vulnerable age, and he doesn’t want them to experience the things he did or to feel the same kind of sorrow. Instead, he wants students to avoid having the same experience by reading the records.

d. Getting back what you give

“N” (then a sixth-grader) delivered water to people in areas where the water supply was cut. She felt the tense atmosphere change as she took action. “I was anxious when the earthquake hit,” she said, “but when I was being kind to others or doing something helpful for them, I could forget my anxiety. And doing something helped others and made them smile, which gave me a sense of accomplishment.” On their way home on the day of the earthquake, “Y” and “M” of Aizu Wakamatsu (then second-year high school students) pushed a car that was stuck in the road. This assistance was greatly appreciated by the car’s owner. The two had been hesitant to get involved at first, but by deciding to offer help, they were “encouraged to take a step forward.” She learned that helping others helps you too. “It doesn’t have to be a major event like the earthquake. I’d like to lend a hand even when I see someone troubled by a small problem because what I give will come back to me.”

In conclusion

General Comment No. 12, “The child’s right to be heard” further states that children’s participation in reconstruction also contributes to their own recovery: “Children’s participation helps them regain control over their lives, contributes to rehabilitation, develops organizational skills and strengthens a sense of identity.” This can be seen in the interviews as well.

It is important, of course, to protect children from harmful situations that could traumatize them. From the perspective of child advocacy studies, however, treating children as agents in the process of reconstruction and supporting their participation are just as important as protecting them. Children are not just the leaders of the future. The voices of children, speaking as those who live in the present, are needed in recovery efforts. Keeping a record is the first step.

What I Gained by Supporting Others

S, Y, T, N, A (third-year high school students)

Place of interview: Miyagi Prefectural Tajiri Sakura High School, Osaki, Miyagi Prefecture

Date: January 21, 2013

Interviewer: Ms. Abe

What I did after the disaster

N: After the earthquake and tsunami, there was an announcement at school to collect relief supplies, so I donated the jersey I used to wear in junior high school. I was very glad that it would be worn by someone in the disaster-struck area. I thought it would be great if something I wasn't using would help affected people.

A: Like "N", I donated stationery. I thought that even though I couldn't go to the affected areas to help, I could make donations. There was stationery that wasn't being used at home, and I hoped it would be of some help.

What I gained by helping others

S: What I did after the earthquake is really not that impressive. First, I helped sort out relief supplies sent from all over Japan, and then I helped pack them to be sent to affected areas. Another project was to travel to affected areas to deliver relief supplies. The initial plan was to remove mud and then deliver supplies, but the mud removal finished much earlier than expected, so our group just delivered supplies. I really didn't do much. After the delivery, we saw the disaster-struck sites. I feel as if we went there for the sake of our own learning rather than volunteering.

What I felt by actually going there was that the people who had been affected by the disaster – we were also affected in wider sense – but those in the coastal area who lost their families and houses, but they were very kind to us. That made us glad. People living in temporary housing seemed resilient, unlike the image of being "victims" as reported in media. For instance, they said, "Have a cup of tea in our house" although we were the ones delivering supplies. People told us a lot about what they were doing, what had happened before and so on. Some seemed to enjoy talking.

Y: What I did after the earthquake is almost the same as what "S" said. I went to the coastal area in August 2011 and saw that the tsunami had gone so far inland. I really wanted to go, hoping I could be of help to others. I was able to have an experience that I could never have by myself. While listening to stories from affected people and delivering supplies, I was wondering if I succeeded in offering help.

T: I donated sport shoes after the quake. I had heard that there weren't enough shoes, and since I was from a big family with unused shoes, I thought of donating. Together with "S" and "Y", I participated in the "Summer Challenge Volunteer 2011" project organized by the City of Osaki's Citizen Activity Promotion Section to visit temporary housing units in Iwanuma on August 11, 2011.

When I went there, I found the people living in temporary housing were strong. Although we were also affected by the disaster, the damage must have been so much greater there. Some were living in temporary housing because their houses had been washed away. Still, they served us snacks and such. We went there to help, but we gained a lot.

Making this activity the first step

C (teacher): When conducting an activity such as calling for donations of stationery or shoes, we only explained what we were collecting and where the items would go, but the calls were never mandatory. It has always been that way. I wasn't sure how many supplies we would be able to collect, but I was glad to see students voluntarily taking the initiative. Some donated supplies saying: "I want them to be used by high school students like me." Most of all, the fact that students took action on their own by considering what they could do rather than to be praised by others is valuable for their future. I think this was their first opportunity to support society hand in hand with others.

S: I had done many volunteer activities in the past. It makes me very happy to have our activities recorded through an interview like this. It's as if our effort is being recognized as actually helping others. Teacher said we weren't conducting activities to receive praise from others, but maybe we partially are.

C: I think it's still okay.

S: With this experience, I'd like to continue to take part in other activities. I want to help others while involving people around me.

Y: I did it because a friend of mine asked, but if I were to do it again, I would like to participate more actively next time.

T: I would be happy if more students who have never done volunteer work would join us by reading this interview in the booklet.

N: I thought that making a donation through the school was just a small thing, but it was nice to look back and talk about it. I remembered that my family also gave us goods for donation.

A: There are still people living in temporary housing, so I would like to continue to make donations if there is a chance. And next time, if I have the opportunity, I want to not only make donations but actually go there to support people.

Born in the Year of the Great Hanshin Earthquake, Helping after the Great East Japan Earthquake

K, N, S, Y, O (third-year students in the Environment and Disaster Mitigation Course)

Place of interview: Hyogo Prefectural Maiko High School, Hyogo Prefecture

Date: February 6, 2013

Interviewer: Ms. Abe

What high school students can do

K: First, I went to Higashi Matsushima in May 2011 for five days to scrape the mud out of houses. I went again three months later in August to remove the mud from a shrine. In 2012, we held a tea party with affected people and also cleaned up the beach.

N: I went [to Tohoku] for the first time when I was a second-year student like “K”, and went for the second time the next year. I pulled weeds in vacant lots and so on.

K: In 2011, there was still mud and debris even in residential areas. In 2012, there was nothing. When I went there for the first time, it was totally different from seeing it on TV. I felt the emotions of the affected people. When I visited in 2012, someone said: “The town has been cleaned up, but there’s nothing left.” I felt that even though the appearance had changed, the essence hadn’t changed.

N: When I went there, things were scattered all over and the insides of houses were worse than I expected. I met high school students from the area. It was heartbreaking to think that people my age had to experience all that.

S: I did the same things as the other two, so I’ll talk about my experience as a group leader in May 2011. It was May and very hot. I wasn’t thinking at all about whether the members of the group were drinking enough water. I realized I’d been inattentive, as some members fell sick. It was right after we became second-year students, so we didn’t communicate well either. At the end, we were able to work as a team, but it was hard at the beginning with some conflicts.

Y: I went in April, a month after the earthquake and tsunami, to remove mud on school grounds and clean the gyms at an elementary school and a junior high school so that they could reopen. We were born in the year of the Great Hanshin Earthquake and had seen the destruction in Kobe in disaster mitigation classes, but we were shocked to see the actual disaster-affected sites directly.

On the first day, we went from one house to another. At the last house, the resident said, “You’re high school students. There’s nothing you can do.” We went because we are taking the Environment and Disaster Mitigation Course and wanted to help since we were given the opportunity. But we were struck by reality then and thought there really wasn’t anything we could do. Still, we insisted on helping out at the house and did many things such as washing floor mats. We ended up working there for two days. During breaks, the resident told us stories about the disaster and in the end he thanked us. I was happy that we were able to help a little bit.

I went in August as well, so that makes four visits in total. I'm planning to visit Tohoku again in March for a graduation trip. I want to keep the connection for a long time.

O: On March 11, I was at a tennis court in Tarumi for a club activity and saw the tsunami on TV in the clubhouse. After that, I wanted to assist in the recovery effort because I study in the Environment and Disaster Mitigation Course. An opportunity to go there was provided by the school, so I went in May and August of 2011. The people in the house we helped soberly told us things like "A friend of mine died" and "I lost a friend who shared the same hobby." They gave us refreshments when we were cleaning. It was more about us being accepted by the local people, rather than us helping them.

In August, we were pulling weeds on an evacuation route. It gave us a sense of accomplishment, but we found the route hard to follow even after the weeds were pulled because it was so winding and narrow. All the students who pulled weeds went up the path, but it was difficult. I don't think elderly people could make it. I thought not just creating evacuation routes but also setting safety standards for them would save lives.

What I remember is an affected person saying: "Japan isn't so bad after all. High school students who are at the age when they just want to have fun are raking mud and cleaning for us." We only removed the mud, but I was very happy to hear that.

Born in the Year of the Great Hanshin Earthquake, Helping after the Great East Japan Earthquake

Y: When I was pulling weeds in August 2012, a local volunteer told me, "Please do not forget." In classes, teacher always says, "You should never forget" and "We have to pass down the story." So, I was aware of it in my head, but then I could actually feel it, hearing those words coming from a local person. Being forgotten is really scary. We have to pass down the story. It's a mission. We visited the disaster area to help out, and we were born in the year of the Great Hanshin Earthquake. It would be nice if we could tell the story by linking those two. I find putting things in writing is very important.

O: There are things only our generation can do, like playing with children.

S: Anyone can play soccer or play with small children. As for what one can do, I don't think they're such difficult things.

N: I really don't want people to forget that there was an earthquake and tsunami, so I'm very grateful that a record will be kept like this in a booklet, and I would like to continue to contribute to these activities.

K: We study disaster mitigation in the Environment and Disaster Mitigation Course. It would be nice if other high school students who don't know how to help would read this report to find out what our generation can do and be inspired to take action.

S: Many students volunteered, not just students in the Environment and Disaster Mitigation Course. I would like the comments of ordinary high school students to be recorded as well, not only ours.

Y: Leaving a record is so important. I'll probably never forget being told in August: "Please don't

forget.” I want to keep telling stories even after going to college and become a new source of information.

O: Keeping a record means putting together what was done in the past, but it’s also linked to future activities. I hope the record from the past will be used in recovery and reconstruction for the future.