

Duke of Cambridge visits BCCJ Back To Business sites in Tohoku

March 6, 2015



On March 1, in association with Her Majesty's Government and the Royal Household, the British Chamber of Commerce in Japan (BCCJ) was honoured to have the chance to introduce the Duke of Cambridge to local communities affected by the Great Eastern Japan Earthquake and Tsunami, in Ishinomaki and Ongawa, highlighting projects supported by the BCCJ's Back to Business (B2B) initiative.

Welcomed to Ishinomaki by BCCJ Executive Director Lori Henderson MBE, the Duke firstly visited Newsee, a museum which houses hand-written newspapers created in the wake of the 3/11 disasters. There, he met Mr Hiroyuki Takeuchi, former editor of Ishinomaki's *Hibi Shimbun*, who explained, "Immediately afterwards it was like hell. So many died and their bodies were on the roads. It is still raw in my memory."

The *Hibi Shimbun* team received bicycles via the B2B initiative in 2011, enabling staff writers to connect with survivors around the city, and travel back and forth from their emergency shelters and homes to the newspaper office. "We felt that as long as we had pen and paper we could send out news, and that this was our duty as a newspaper", said Takeuchi.

The Duke then met privately with Shinichi and Ryoko Endo who tragically lost all three children - Hana, 13, Kanta, 10, and Kana, 8 - on 3/11. The Endos passed gifts of *hyoshigi* straps to the visitor, made with wood from the tsunami debris combined with English oak, "to take back to your family in London". Mr Endo has been crafting the straps, often used as keychains, since 2011 to say thank you to volunteers who've helped the recovery effort.

The Endos shared with the visitor their activities with the community group, 'Team Watahoi', comprised of survivors who took refuge in Watanoha Nursery School emergency shelter on 3/11. Mrs Endo says, "They are our family now".

The Endos also shared details of their work with the Taylor Anderson Memorial Fund, for which the BCCJ's Henderson is a board member, supporting Andy and Jeanne Anderson, parents of JET Taylor who was also taken on 3/11. Through this NPO, Mr Endo, a carpenter, has constructed shelves for libraries in seven Ishinomaki primary school, with a view to promoting English-language learning in the area.

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The Duke subsequently traveled to Hiyoriyama, a hill overlooking Ishinomaki, where he was met by Consul General Michael Shearer MBE and the Mayor of Ishinomaki, Hiroshi Kameyama.

One of the BCCJ's B2B local leaders, Kyoko Sasaki, then read His Royal Highness a poem, "To the Survivors" by 100 year old local writer Toyo Shibata*. Sasaki subsequently handed over flowers which the Duke placed under the hilltop shrine, where he paused for a moment of reflection.

Two local schoolchildren then passed the Duke cranes they had made, to symbolise hope for the future. The Duke asked "Did you make these at home?". One girl answered, "Yes, but we are still living in temporary housing."

The Duke's final stop in the area was the Chime of Hope shopping street in Onagawa, where he was welcomed by Mayor Yoshiaki Suda accompanied by a dance troupe performing the local "lion dance"; the Duke playfully succumbed to being "bitten" by the lion, operated by local children.



At one of the shops, Onagawa Art Guild, the Duke met graffiti artist Shuhei Sakimura, who presented a piece of art comprising Japanese *koi*, and the Union Jack.

Sakimura led BCCJ B2B volunteer activities in Onagawa in September 2012, painting fishermen's warehouses with vibrant designs that link the UK and Japan.

Takahiro Aoyama, General Manager of the Onagawa Chamber of Commerce, then guided the Duke to a lone bell which used to sit at Onagawa station along with two others - lost on 3/11. A newly built station, designed by Shigeru Ban, will reopen on March 21 2015.



Walking towards the bell, the Duke heard first-hand how Aoyama-san had been forced to flee to the roof of the four-storey Chamber of Commerce building, where he remained overnight on 3/11, submerged up to his knees by the tsunami wave.

Aoyama was instrumental in coordinating the establishment of the Chime of Hope shopping area, which currently houses around 30 small businesses, including a fruit and vegetable shop, a barber, and a cram-school. The BCCJ's Back to Business initiative provided solar panel lighting for Chime of Hope, enabling business and community activities to take place in the evenings as well as during the day.

Upon ringing the lone bell, the Duke was greeted with cheers and applause from the crowd, among which were representatives from local NPOs such as It's Not Just Mud, TOMODACHI, and Peaceboat.

The visit to Tohoku involved the Duke of Cambridge's final engagements in Japan, before he flew into China on the afternoon of March 1, as the first senior British royal on an official visit there in 30 years.

BCCJ Back To Business initiative [HERE](#)

BCCJ Back To Business photos [HERE](#)

*
"To the survivors" by Toyo Shibata

In disbelief
 All I can do
 Is stare at the television
 Wringing my hands

The aftershocks
 Cut deeper
 Into the already wounded souls

Like everyone else
 I want to put balm on those wounds
 There must be something I can do

Almost a hundred years old
 My time is near
 From Heaven let me be
 The healing sun and wind

Giving hope to all

I know

Hard times are in store

But the new morning always comes

Be strong!

Almost 4 years ago on March 11.

Children were sobbing, freezing, and quivering
on that cold snowy day.

People saw hell stretching below in all directions.

People tried to rescue those who were in danger,
but the fire was coming closer and closer.

Night fell on Ishinomaki.

There were no heaters, no blankets, and a lack of food.

People could only hear cries for help coming from the deep, muddy dark black water.

It was a living nightmare.

After that we lost everything, our cars, houses, families, friends, jobs and hope.

However, we were able to find new hope.

That is Lori, the BCCJ, and people around the world.

Today we also find hope in the Duke of Cambridge.

I'd like to give a special thanks from the bottom of my heart.

2015.3.1

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